

Coming home: University exchange students' narratives of cultural re-entry

by

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Abstract

Cultural re-entry – the process of returning to one’s home culture after an overseas sojourn – is ostensibly a return to the familiar: familiar places and familiar people. Yet, this simplistic understanding of the phenomenon belies its multi-layered, complex nature. More appropriately framed as a psychological process than one of physical relocation, re-entry is characteristically challenging for sojourners, its impact being felt affectively, behaviourally and cognitively. Despite being a focus of research for half a century, the challenges associated with re-entry remain primarily unexpected, by both sojourners and those at home. The cost –personal, social and financial – of such ignorance is great. As globalization and concomitant increased travel becomes a reality, an increasing number of people world-wide will experience the phenomenon of re-entry.

This longitudinal qualitative study sought to explore the experiences and perceptions of six university students during the first six months of their return to their home culture from an international exchange. Employing a narrative inquiry approach, this study sought open-ended exploration, the purpose of which was to understand rather than explain the experience. It was motivated by a desire to enhance multiple meanings as opposed to enhancing certainty. In presenting six individual stories this study gave voice to experience, and in doing so, traded generalisation for particularisation.

There are a number of provocative findings from this study. First, the study underscored the inherently idiosyncratic nature of each person’s re-entry experience. Second, it reinforced the notion of cultural adjustment as a *process*, the symbiotic relationship between the overseas experience and re-entry clearly discernible. Third, affective and cognitive processes (internal) – as opposed to behavioural processes (external) – were found to dominate the participants’ re-entry experiences. Finally, relationships emerged as the most significant and powerful variable in the re-entry experience, a finding which positions re-entry as a social rather than a personal phenomenon.

While students were the lens through which the phenomenon of re-entry was explored in this study, these findings may be of interest to the myriad groups who undertake sojourns – not only prospective sojourners, but also their families, friends and colleagues, and those responsible for organizing and managing sojourner travel.

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Introduction

So the journey is over and I am back again where I started, richer by much experience and poorer by many exploded convictions, many perished certainties.

(Aldous Huxley, *Jesting Pilate: The Diary of a Journey*)

When familiar becomes unfamiliar

In December 2001 I boarded a Qantas jet with my two children - then aged 11 and 6. We were returning to Australia after having lived for 16 months in Asia. I had been teaching English as a Second Language in a local Muslim high school while on leave from my university teaching. As I first entered the aeroplane cabin I was consciously aware of the size of the female flight attendant – she seemed so big. I was also somewhat challenged by her assertive manner. Yet at the same time I felt strangely comforted by her broad Australian accent.

Seven hours later we queued in the customs hall in Melbourne. I stood transfixed, unable to tear my eyes away from the bare shoulders of the young girl in front of me. All the women around me were wearing black or brown clothing and their voices seemed so *loud*. While I knew none of these women personally, their faces seemed vaguely familiar. I had this inexplicable urge to smile and say hello to everyone. The man behind the counter smiled at me. He wasn't carrying a rifle. He understood what I was saying. Suddenly it felt good to be home.

The next evening – a legacy of one of those long, slow, hot days where daylight never seems to end – I happened upon a young man wearing nothing but a pair of Speedo bathers in that quintessential of Australian icons, the local milk bar. At great social risk I said to him, “Gosh, where I’ve just come from, you would have been put in prison for wearing something like that in public.” His response, both verbal and non-verbal, left me in no doubt that my comment was not only socially risky, but clear evidence of mental instability. Later that evening I emptied my wardrobe – and donated to charity – all skirts with hemlines above the knee and shirts without sleeves, convinced that I would never bare so much skin again. This was a decision I have lived to regret.

My first trip to the supermarket was a frenzied collection of long forgotten delicacies – ham products, salamis and cheeses. My trolley overflowed. Yet, my delight was interrupted at the check out as I witnessed, with horror, the young female assistants shouting at one another in friendly crossfire across the cash registers. I looked around me to see whether anyone else was appalled by this loud, brash behaviour. Apparently not.

How could I explain to well-meaning relatives, some days later, the “ungrateful, spoilt” behaviour of my 6 year old – well experienced in the Borneo jungle, and well used to monkeys in her back yard – when she expressed disappointment in her outing to see the handful of monkeys in a compound in the local park? I couldn’t. They wouldn’t understand.

Two weeks after my return I sat and shared Christmas lunch with my large and loving extended family. During lunch, not one person asked anything about my previous 16 months, the conversation, rather, revolving around nieces and nephews, ill relatives and local issues in my small home town. I felt bored and restless. Then I felt guilty for feeling bored and restless. My mind wandered to the cane furniture-clad verandah of the British High Commission overlooking the South China Sea where I had, just weeks earlier, shared a ‘Christmas lunch’ with Canadian, British, Indian and Pakistani colleagues. Bewildered and perplexed by my family’s apparent lack of interest, I began to question whether in fact the last 16 months had actually happened. Was I really living in a different country, with a different job, different house, different car and different friends, just two weeks ago? I knew I was loved and adored and supported in any endeavour, but why the silence?

Later that day I plastered my fridge with photos of my Asian sojourn to remind myself that I wasn’t going insane. I was beginning to genuinely understand and appreciate, for the first time, Thoreau’s claim that “you never gain something but that you lose something.” Suddenly it didn’t feel so good to be home.

My anomie encouraged me to contact a friend who had lived overseas at the same time as us. After we worked through the predictable social chit-chat, I simply looked at him and asked, “Is it just me?” He knew exactly what I meant. No other words needed to pass between us. His response – “No” – although doing little to reduce the dissonance I was feeling, left me with a mixed sense of relief and fascination.

Thus began my long and continuing interest in the phenomenon of ‘coming home’ (Storti, 2001), known variously in the literature as *reverse culture shock*, *repatriation* and

readjustment, amongst others, and referred to in this study and others as cultural *re-entry*¹ (see, for example, Lank, 1985; Weaver, 1994). Moving to another culture had been an “expected confrontation with the unfamiliar”; re-entry had been an “unexpected confrontation with the familiar” (Paige, 1984, cited in Lerstrom, 1995, p. 3). I had prepared myself well for the “culture shock” (Oberg, 1960, p. 177) I had expected to experience during the initial stages of my overseas sojourn. Nothing had prepared me for the re-entry experience. At 40 years of age I was acutely aware of my own culture, in all its ugliness and beauty, for the very first time. Familiar now seemed unfamiliar. Austin (1983b), citing Sapir, captures this phenomenon aptly: “it is often precisely the familiar that a wider perspective reveals as the curiously exceptional” (p. 125). Reading Bill Holm’s *Coming Home Crazy* (1990) convinced me that my re-entry experience was not an isolated one.

The phenomenon of re-entry

Re-entry literally refers to the process of returning to one’s home country after an overseas sojourn – a sojourn being defined as a temporary residence in another culture (Yang, 2000). Re-entry, then, is ostensibly a return to the familiar: familiar place, familiar people. Understandably, many would assume this process to be relatively unproblematic. The common assumption about re-entry is, “they’re *coming home*, aren’t they? How much adjustment can there be?” (Black, 1992, p. 177, emphasis in original). As Sussman (2001) suggests, the thought of re-entry being difficult is “counter-intuitive” (p. 110). Indeed, research has consistently shown that while adjustment difficulties are usually anticipated during the overseas sojourn, they are rarely anticipated during re-entry (see, for example, Martin, 1984; Storti, 2001). Yet, this simplistic understanding of re-entry belies the multi-layered, complex nature of the phenomenon. Anthologies such as Austin’s (1986) *Cross-cultural reentry: A book of readings* and Smith’s (1996) *Strangers at Home: Essays on the effects of living overseas and coming “home” to a strange land*, as well as the narratives presented in this study, are testimony to this complex lived experience of returnees. Anecdotal and empirical evidence has consistently shown that re-entry is characteristically, although not exclusively, challenging for most sojourners (see, for example, Austin, 1986; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Smith, 1996; Walling, Eriksson, Meese, Ciofica & Gorton, 2006). The reasons for this are many and varied.

When understood as a “psychological process” rather than a “physical relocation” (Arthur, 2003, p. 174), the multi-dimensional challenges inherent in re-entry become more readily

¹ The interchangeable nature of much of the terminology in the cross-cultural literature will be discussed in more detail in the Literature Review.

apparent. Re-entry impacts on sojourners *affectively* (that is, how sojourners *feel*); *behaviourally* (how sojourners *behave*); and *cognitively* (how sojourners *think*) (see, for example, Ward, Bochner & Furnham, 2001), each dimension being experienced differently, and to varying degrees, by sojourners.

Affectively, sojourners typically experience some form of stress as they attempt to deal with the feelings of loss and change that accompany the transition from host culture relationships and lifestyle to home culture relationships and lifestyle. With this stress come attendant coping strategies. The sudden, and often permanent, loss of relationships after an overseas sojourn can, for example, be emotionally challenging – for both the people remaining in the host culture as well as the sojourner. People at home also typically find it hard to relate to the sojourner's overseas experience. Returning sojourners regularly cite lack of interest from others in their overseas experience as contributing to their difficulties with re-entry (see, for example, Mendelson, Citron & La Brack, 2006; Smith, 2002b). Feelings of loneliness, frustration, sadness, restlessness and disorientation amongst returning sojourners are, therefore, common (see, for example, Werkman, 1980).

Behaviourally, sojourners must 'unlearn' the knowledge, skills and behaviours that were culturally appropriate and brought them success in the host culture, and 'relearn' the knowledge, skills and behaviour appropriate to their home culture. The intricacies of cultural behaviour position this as a potentially troublesome area for many sojourners. Van Hoof and Verbeeten (2005) cite the experience of one exchange student, for example, who, upon requesting water with her dinner – a common request in the United States – was promptly told by a 75 year old in Italy, "Wine is for drinking, water is for washing" (p. 42). In particular, culturally idiosyncratic interpersonal communication styles pose specific challenges. 'Unlearning' the host culture rules for local etiquette and methods of resolving conflict, for example, can be a confusing process for both the sojourner and those at home upon return. Clearly, many sojourners feel like 'strangers at home' during re-entry (Smith, 1996). Put simply, what was once known and understood, can seem alien and elusive for returning sojourners. Added to this, new skills acquired during the overseas sojourn are often ignored or dismissed by those at home (see, for example, Vidal, Valle, Aragón & Brewster, 2007; Mendelson et al., 2006). For many sojourners, then, the 'gold' of their overseas experience can seemingly turn to 'ashes' once home (Osland, 1995).

Cognitively, sojourners can experience dissonance and identity crises during re-entry. This is because both the sojourner and those at home have changed during the sojourn, yet neither expects nor anticipates changes in the other (see, for example, Sussman, 1986). Moreover,

where sojourners move from a Western individualist culture to a collectivist culture, some of those changes can be overtly rejected by friends and family (see, for example, Butcher, 2002; Kidder, 1992). By way of illustrating this point, in Japan there is wide-spread, and often derogatory, use of the specialised term *kaigi seicho nihonjin* to refer to Japanese who have spent time overseas (Ward et al., 2001, p. 188). In particular, a changed world perspective – including values – can often distance sojourners from their home culture and those in it. Things are noticed at home that weren't noticed before: familial obligation, pollution, wastefulness, lack of modesty, rules and regulations – a phenomenon of 'discovering' one's own culture for the first time that has consistent recognition in the literature (Adler, 1975; Ballard, 1981; Weaver, 1998). In essence, many sojourners realise that they "have outgrown parts of their previous lives" (Osland, 1995, p. 171). Added to this, life can seem 'routinised' and boring for the returning sojourner. They are no longer, as they were overseas, a member of a special minority group; they have returned to being a 'little fish in a big sea' (Storti, 2001). The process of re-evaluating self and others, then, is characteristically a vexed one during re-entry.

From the description above, it is clear that cultural re-entry is far more complex than simply physically returning to one's home culture – a place of 'familiarity'. What was once familiar can, upon re-entry, feel unfamiliar. It is also apparent that it is not only the returning sojourner who experiences the challenges of re-entry; the impact is felt by family, friends and colleagues as well.

None of this suggests that re-entry is experienced consistently, or permanently, negatively by sojourners (see, for example, Briody & Baba, 1991; Napier & Peterson, 1991). For example, relationships with parents can improve (see, for example, Martin, 1986); sojourners can develop an increased sense of purpose in their vocation (see, for example, Walling et al., 2006); and there can be a greater appreciation, and active support, of cultural differences (see, for example, Bochner, 1986; Wilson, 1993c). Re-entry experiences, then, are best represented as a continuum – from wholly difficult to wholly positive –with the vast majority falling somewhere in between.

For most sojourners, challenging re-entry experiences are short-lived as a process of adjustment to the home culture takes place. Empirical studies suggest that readjustment to the home culture characteristically takes between six and 18 months (see, for example, Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Vidal et al., 2007), with most sojourners having adjusted within six months (Adler, 1981). For a few, however, adjustment is elusive or unsought and return to the host

culture – or marginalisation within the home culture – is the preferred or accepted option (see, for example, Christofi & Thompson, 2007).

Despite the challenges posed by re-entry for many returnees, and the often “bittersweet” (Martin & Harrell, 1996, p. 307; Steyn & Grant, 2007, p. 378) nature of that experience, few would question the immanent value of their sojourn. The life-changing outcomes and transformative nature of an overseas sojourn are well documented (see, for example, Bachner & Zeuschel, 1994; Dwyer, 2004; Quezada, 2004). As Storti (2001) suggests, “it is precisely because the overseas experience is so rich and stimulating, that re-entry becomes a problem” (p. xxi). Re-entry, then, like an overseas sojourn, is a paradoxical phenomenon: it can be “simultaneously troublesome and enriching” (Kim, 2001, p. 21). With the challenges and frustration, however, come opportunities for growth (Adler, 1981).

The previous discussion illustrates that it is possible to identify some common experiences between returnees and a concomitant range of responses to these experiences, yet each sojourner’s experience is unique. This uniqueness of the re-entry experience is perhaps not surprising given the diverse groupings of people who engage in intercultural experiences (for example, refugees, students, teachers, diplomats, missionaries, humanitarian workers, artists, journalists, itinerant workers, and Peace Corps, military, government and business personnel) all with differing, *inter alia*, personalities, purposes for their sojourns, experiences in their host country, lengths of time away, degrees of voluntariness and levels of social support. As Storti (2001) points out:

there is re-entry after a year overseas, after two, after four. There is re-entry from a country you loved and hated to leave, and from a country you did not enjoy and are happy to turn your back on. There is re-entry from... developed countries and from developing countries... There is re-entry at age thirty, with children, and at age fifty-five as grandparents. This is your first re-entry, your second, and your fourth. You may return to the same house you left and the same job, or you may return to a different part of your home country and to a different job. Or to no job at all. There is re-entry of people who were running away from home and of expatriates who went abroad kicking and screaming. (pp. xix-xx)

These wide-ranging variables impel an exploration of the re-entry experience that honours and respects the very idiosyncratic nature of that experience.

As a 40 year old, sole parent of two children, returning from my first overseas sojourn to lecture in a Western university environment after having taught for 16 months in an Asian, Muslim high school, my re-entry experience was definitely unique. My public face portrayed my own re-entry as unremarkable. Yet, internally I struggled to make sense of what I was experiencing – affectively, behaviourally and cognitively. This was exemplified in an email message sent to a friend six months after my homecoming:

I'm quite reluctant to share how I feel with many people, because they simply can't understand – don't have the shared experience to be able to empathise. I see my whole experience of being away – emotionally, physically (the context, the place itself) and professionally, AND my being home, as continuous juxtaposition. Nothing is black and white anymore (if indeed, it ever was). Everything seems to be in shades – movable, evolving, changing, ephemeral shades. I want to be here, I want to be there; it is easier, it is more difficult; I miss it, but I love being home; I want to go away again, I want to stay put; the world is smaller, the world is larger; I have a better sense of who I am, I'm still searching for parts of the jigsaw puzzle. I'm not insane. I just see things differently now. Nothing can ever be the same again. (May 13, 2002)

My re-entry experience was temporarily destabilising. It was characterised by many of the attributes described in the literature – loss, boredom, marginalisation, dissonance and growth. Only in hindsight, as a result of my reading for this study, am I now aware of how similar, yet paradoxically how different, my experience was to others. This study is an attempt to validate the uniqueness of others' re-entry experiences.

Significance of re-entry research

Cultural re-entry, as a topic of research, is significant for three key reasons. First, movement between cultures has reached unprecedented heights during recent decades, and will undoubtedly continue to expand (Cetron & Davies, 2008; Schuerkens, 2005; Ward et al., 2001). This means that the number of people world-wide likely to experience the

phenomenon of re-entry, will also expand. Second, cross-cultural literature continues to focus on adjustment to the *host* culture at the expense of adjustment to the *home* culture, an imbalance principally explained by the often unexpected nature and impact of re-entry (see, for example, Cox, 2004; Tannenbaum, 2007). Third, the ‘cost’ – personally, socially, and financially – of difficult re-entries, impels a study of this phenomenon (see, for example, Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Newton, Hutchings & Kabanoff, 2007; Storti, 2001). Furthermore, as a topic of research *in Australia*, re-entry has particular significance; there is an absence of Australian-focussed literature. That re-entry is worthy of closer scrutiny is clear.

Increased movement between cultures

Movement between cultures is not new, a situation well documented in migration literature (see, for example, Hoerder, 2002). Nor is re-entry new: Homer, in one of the most renowned home-coming stories in Western literature, related the experience of Odysseus who, on returning to his homeland Ithaca after a 20 year absence, lamented, “Alas! And now where on earth am I? What do I here myself?” What *is* new is the increasingly temporary nature of movement between cultures.

The shift from predominantly permanent to predominantly temporary cultural movement began at the end of the Second World War. This was a result of the boom in student exchanges and the expansion of multi-national trade with post-war development, and later the development of the Peace Corps in the 1960s (Kim, 2001). More recently, literal and metaphoric boundaries worldwide have diminished; there has been an “accelerated shrinking of the world” (Ward et al., 2001, p. xiv) as technological advances have “compress[ed] the world in time and space” and travel has become easier, cheaper and faster (Stromquist, 2007, p. 81). International movements of people have, as a consequence, increased (Schuerkens, 2005). Combined with this, educational institutions and businesses are increasingly being called to ‘internationalise’ as globalisation becomes a reality (Jackson, 2008; Knight, 2005, <http://www.bc.edu>). All this has resulted in what Sussman (2000) describes as an “explosion of short term cultural transitions” during the late 20th century (p. 356). By way of illustrating this point, Storti (2001) claims that approximately 2.5 million Americans were sojourning overseas at any one given time at the turn of the 20th century. The critical point being made here is that with temporary travel comes re-entry; the majority of sojourners will return to their home culture at some point in time. Thus, re-entry has current and future significance.

Prioritising of cultural adjustment

Although re-entry has been a steadily increasingly focus of research for half a century (see, for example, Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Martin, 1984; Sussman, 2002), the bulk of the cultural adjustment literature has remained focussed on adjustment to the host culture at the expense of re-adjustment to the home culture. As early as 1973, Meintel voiced concern about the fact that the dominant discussion around culture shock didn't include the concept of reverse culture shock. This disparity continues to exist despite the fact that research has consistently demonstrated that re-entry is equally, if not more, problematic than initial adjustment to the host culture (see, for example, Adler, 1981; Black, Gregersen & Mendenhall, 1992; Tannenbaum, 2007). Indeed, Sussman (2000) claims that there is "near ubiquitous distress experienced" during re-entry (p. 355). The primary reason for this imbalance in the literature is that there is an assumption that problems upon return will be minimal (Tung, 1988). Re-entry difficulties are, then, primarily unexpected.

While researchers *have* highlighted – in the re-entry literature which does exist – its unexpected and underestimated impact, people, in the main, remain ignorant of this (see, for example, Cox, 2004; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Martin, 1984; Rogers & Ward, 1993). One of the reasons for this is that, until relatively recently, re-entry was not considered to be part of the cultural adjustment process. The dominant perspective has been that cultural adjustment finishes when the sojourner leaves the host country; it has been basically considered a "one-way street" (Clague & Krupp, 1978, p. 29). Cultural orientation programs have reflected this perspective and have thus, albeit unwittingly, contributed to the ignorance of the challenges of re-entry (see, for example, La Brack, 1993). Although first recognised over three decades ago (Meintel, 1973), it was La Brack's (1993) positioning of re-entry as the "missing linkage" (p. 241) in cultural adjustment that gained the phenomenon its increasingly accepted integral role in the overall *process* of an intercultural experience (see, for example, Cox, 2004; Gaw, 2000; Hanratty, 2001; Martin & Harrell, 2004). However, the situation remains that, despite re-entry's increasing recognition as part of the overall process of cultural adjustment, it continues to be primarily both unexpected and challenging. This renders it worthy of further investigation and subsequent understanding.

This study, in focussing particularly on re-entry, directly addresses the imbalance apparent in the cultural adjustment literature. In giving voice to individual experience of re-entry it also highlights the qualitative nature of that experience, and in doing so, contributes to making visible what has hitherto been primarily unexpected. Moreover, in explicitly incorporating elements of the participants' overseas experiences, this study reinforces the critical role of re-

entry in the overall process of cultural adjustment. The gaps evident from literature's prioritising of cultural adjustment have, then, been directly considered in this study.

Cost

The 'cost' of a difficult re-entry is both individual and collective. As highlighted in the previous section, the personal cost of a challenging re-entry experience – affectively, behaviourally and cognitively – can be high. Returning long-term political exiles in Steyn's and Grant's (2007) study, for example, spoke of their feelings of alienation, self-doubt and confusion brought about by their difficulties of re-integrating; they had lost their capacity to engage appropriately in daily tasks like shopping, and specialised tasks like job interviews. Yet, while the returnees themselves are at the centre of the re-entry experience, family, friends and work colleagues must also navigate the challenging experience of renegotiating relationships with them (see, for example, Osland, 1995). Businesses, too, must bear the financial costs of the alarming attrition rate of personnel after an overseas sojourn (Cox, 2004; Storti, 2001). Bossard and Peterson (2005), for example, claim that between one third and one half of all returning American personnel from multinational companies are no longer employed by the firm that sent them abroad within two years of their returning home. In terms of education, large amounts of money are expended by governments and institutions in sending students abroad (see, for example, Westwood, Lawrence & Paul, 1986). An inability to exploit the benefits of such an experience, once home, is costly to both the individual and the institutions involved. Clearly, the benefits to be gained from an enhanced understanding of re-entry extend well beyond the individual sojourner. Reduced 'cost' – personal, social and financial – is, then, a critical justification for a study of re-entry.

Re-entry research in Australia

Subjects in previous re-entry research have been drawn from a variety of cultures (see, for example, Cannon, 2000 – Indonesia; Furukawa, 1997 – Japan; Gama & Pedersen, 1997 – Brazil; Martin, 1984 – USA; Overland, 2008 – Vietnam; Sahin, 1990 – Turkey; Steyn & Grant, 2007 – South Africa; Tannenbaum, 2007 – Israel). Yet, there is a notable absence of research with an Australian focus. This study, in focussing on the experiences and perceptions of Australian university students, will redress this gap.

Approaches to study

This study employs a narrative inquiry approach. In its most simplistic representation, narrative inquiry is the study of *story*, *interpretation* and *discourse* (Leggo, 2008). In other

words, narrative inquiry investigates *what* happened, the *significance* or *meaning* of that, and *how* it is told or shared. Narrative inquiry, as an approach, has been adopted in this study for two key reasons: first, because it is ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically congruent with the constructivist paradigm within which this research is framed, and, in particular, is consonant with an exploration of experience – the primary aim of this study; and second, it counter-balances previous, contrasting, research approaches that have hitherto dominated re-entry research.

Although anecdotal literature abounds in the field (see for example, Austin, 1983a), much of the existing empirical research on re-entry has been reductionist in its approach (see, for example, Adler, 1981; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Herman & Tetrack, 2009). In other words, it has sought to fragment and categorise the experience and generalise from findings. Moreover, there has been a strong dependence on psychometric approaches (see, for example, Furukawa, 1997; Gaw, 2000; Sahin, 1990), the purposes of which are primarily to predict, explain and control. A direct outcome of such approaches is that re-entry has been pathologised in the literature. There is, then, a paucity of what Bachner and Zeuschel (1994) refer to as “depth” approaches such as life stories and autobiographies (p. 5). This is despite the fact that there have been numerous calls in the past for the adoption of such approaches (Pedersen, 1995; Van Hoof & Verbeeten, 2005; Zaharna, 1989). Narrative inquiry provides the opportunity for such a “depth” approach.

This longitudinal study, then, using student exchange as a lens through which to focus on the broader issues related to the phenomenon of re-entry, aims to explore the re-entry experiences and perceptions of six university students during the first six months of their return from an international exchange². This aim has been met through collecting, analysing and presenting students’ individual stories. In doing so it addresses the research question:

What are the re-entry experiences of six Australian university students returning from an international exchange?

In presenting six individual stories this study gives voice to experience, and in doing so, trades generalisation for particularisation. I wanted to avoid, as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) purport, the “typical social science preoccupation with documenting pathology and suggesting remedies” (p. 141). This study seeks not to predict and control, or to provide solutions or answers – aims which have hitherto dominated cultural adjustment research.

² ‘International exchange’, as used in this study, represents any program that involves studying overseas. It does not necessarily infer that there was a reciprocal arrangement in place between institutions.

Rather it seeks “open-ended exploration” (Walling et al., 2006, p. 155), the purpose of which is to understand rather than explain the experience. It is motivated by a desire to enhance multiple meanings as opposed to enhancing certainty (Barone, 2001). As Sacks (1986) contends:

If we wish to know about a man, we ask, ‘What is his story – his real, innermost story?’ – for each of us is a biography, a story. Each of us is a singular narrative, which is constructed, continually, unconsciously, by, through, and in us – through our perceptions, our feelings, our thoughts, our actions; and not least, our discourse, our spoken narrations. Biologically, physiologically, we are not so different from each other; historically, as narratives – we are each of us unique. (p. 105, emphasis in original)

Such an approach, then, values individual voices and recognises the personalised, idiosyncratic nature of cross-cultural experience.

This study will contribute to the extant body of literature in terms of substantive knowledge of the re-entry phenomenon, primarily by contesting the standard conceptual framework within which re-entry has hitherto been explored. It will also draw upon and extend the current literature and conceptions of narrative, and in doing so, broaden assumptions about what constitutes legitimate research.

A longitudinal approach has been adopted in this study: participants were interviewed three times each over a period of six months. Existing re-entry literature is predominantly cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. Thus, the re-entry experience is primarily investigated and reported in the literature as a ‘snapshot’ – a static experience – rather than a developmental process. The need for longitudinal studies in regard to re-entry research has long been identified (Black et al., 1992; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Martin, 1984; Raschio, 1987; Uehara, 1986), but primarily unrealised. This study seeks to address this methodological gap in the re-entry literature.

Researcher voice

Whilst neither an “author-saturated” nor an “author-evacuated” text (Geertz, 1988, p. 9), the approach to this study occupies a space somewhere in between. Throughout this dissertation, then, both *first* person and *third* person are used in the reporting. Each mode of reporting

fulfils a particular role and complements the other. It is a reciprocal relationship: the personal informs the theory and the theory informs the personal. In particular, the use of first person, an approach peculiar to qualitative research, has been described by Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) as “not only justifiable, but essential” for researchers whose aim is the “re-representation and re-construction of social reality” (p. 338). I wanted to avoid using an impersonal, objective, omniscient voice that Rorty (1982) claims characterises traditional research writing – the type of writing “which the universe uses to explain itself to itself” (p. 130).

There has been no attempt to ‘distance’ myself, to stand above and outside my study, rather a genuine acceptance that the researcher self is a crucial resource and not a limitation (Denscombe, 1998). My own experience is unapologetically included in this research. I believe very strongly in Mills’s (1959) assertion that scholars must learn to use their life experience in their intellectual work – that each should be used “for the enrichment of the other” (p. 195). Clandinin and Connelly (1994), too, in acknowledging the centrality of the researcher’s own experience in personal experience methods, advocate the use of the researcher’s own narratives of experience as starting points in research – an approach I have used in this study. Yet, such personal and professional symbiosis is not without its challenges in research; this is something that will be explored in more detail in Chapter Three.

Context of the study

While university students are the subjects of this study, the focus is on the re-entry phenomenon itself, not international exchange programs in higher education. While some aspects of the re-entry experience might be particular to students as a group (for example, adjustment to academic environments at home), the re-entry literature tends not to differentiate extensively between groups, the similarities of the re-entry experience between different groups tending to outweigh the differences. Nonetheless, some background information relating to the participants and their home culture is important in order to establish a context for the study and to provide a backdrop for the participants’ shared experiences during their re-entry.

Home culture

Tasmania is a mountainous state of Australia, approximately the size of West Virginia, located 240 kilometres off the south-east corner of mainland Australia. It experiences a temperate maritime climate. Over a third of the state is reserved in National Parks and the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (About Australia, 2009, [www.about-](http://www.about-tasmania.com.au)

australia.com). Tasmania has an ageing, homogeneous and predominantly unskilled population of approximately 500,000. In 2006: 34% of the population was under the age of 24; 4 % spoke a language other than English at home; and the unemployment rate was 6.5%. Approximately 50% of the population had post-compulsory school qualifications (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2009, www.abs.gov.au).

Tasmania has one university, spread over three campuses. In 2008, there was a total enrolment of 22,325 (14,425 full-time equivalent), approximately 3,000 of whom were on-campus (as opposed to off-shore) overseas students (www.utas.edu.au/docs/statistics). With universities worldwide being increasingly pressured to 'internationalise' their curriculum (see, for example, Altbach & Teichler, 2001; Jackson, 2008; Knight, 2004), it is perhaps not surprising that international student exchange numbers, both incoming and outgoing, have increased steadily in this university over recent years. In 2000, for example, the total number of outgoing international exchange students at this university was 26 (Wise, personal communication, October 3, 2005). By 2008, that number had more than doubled to 62 (Nadj, personal communication, April 3, 2009). Yet, despite this increase, this figure represents less than one per cent of students overall at this university participating in overseas exchange programs. This suggests that the experiences shared by the participants in this study are, within their own university context, somewhat exceptional.

Participants³

The six participants in this study – four female and two male – all attended the one university in Tasmania. They represented five different schools from five faculties: education, law, architecture, business and Asian languages and ranged in age from 22 to 26. Time spent overseas, on the international exchange preceding the re-entry about which they were being interviewed, ranged from five to 18 months. In the year the interviews were conducted, three participants were completing their final year of an undergraduate degree, two were beginning second degrees and one had recently withdrawn from an undergraduate honours degree and assumed the role of tutor in the school in which she had completed her undergraduate degree. Their exchange destinations were equally diverse: Canada, Japan, Malta, Scotland and Sweden. Such a blend, while not consciously selected, is consonant with a focus on difference and diversity, and the idiosyncrasies of the particular – hallmarks of the narrative way of knowing (Barone, personal communication, 2002).

³ The use of the term 'participant' (rather than 'subject' or 'interviewee') was a deliberate decision in the reporting of this study, designed to underscore my belief in the importance of the co-construction process.

Organisation of the dissertation

As well as this introductory chapter, the dissertation includes nine other chapters.

Chapter Two presents a comprehensive literature review. This chapter provides both an historical and a conceptual overview of existing anecdotal, empirical and theoretical literature on re-entry. Broad conceptual frameworks informing the re-entry literature are first considered, and then the re-entry literature specifically is explored through affective, behavioural and cognitive domains. A range of sojourners' experiences are explored in this literature.

Chapter Three (Ways of Knowing – Methodology 1) provides an extended discussion of the key influences upon, and the decision-making involved in, the conceptualisation, design and implementation of this study. Specifically, it considers: the influence of key thinkers and writers from various disciplines in the human sciences; the role and function of narrative inquiry as a methodological approach; the benefits and challenges of interactional interviewing as a method of data gathering; recruitment of subjects; and the tensions surrounding ethical issues in this narrative inquiry.

Chapter Four (Ways of Telling – Methodology 2) focuses specifically on the process of analysis and the subsequent reporting of the findings from this study. It presents both a description and justification of: analysis *per se*, in narrative inquiry; and the specific analysis undertaken, and the structure employed, in the reporting of this study. Dilemmas surrounding the representation of participants and the contested nature of validity in narrative inquiry are also considered in this chapter. The chapter concludes with a brief guide to reading the narrative chapters.

This dissertation does not report its findings in traditional format. That is, there are no distinct 'Results' and 'Discussion' chapters. The traditional research report format of presenting all results first, then a discussion of those results is, I believe, manifestly inappropriate for narrative reporting because in this format meaning is separated from context. A more detailed discussion of the justification of the structure employed in the reporting of this study is provided in Chapter Four (Ways of Telling – Methodology 2). Rather, in this dissertation, chapters five through ten are presented as personal narrative chapters, one for each participant in this study. Each participant's narrative chapter contains two distinct sections: a narrative construction representing their experiences both overseas and upon re-entry to their home culture, and an analysis of those experiences.

In Chapter Eleven, conclusions are drawn and implications and limitations of this study, as well as recommendations for future research, are discussed.

Literature Review

The increase in the [cultural adjustment] literature has reflected the substantial growth in the movement of people around the world, a process that has placed more and more individuals into contact with culturally unfamiliar persons. (Ward et al., 2001, p. xiv)

Introduction

In this chapter I investigate those bodies of literature relevant to this study. I provide both an historical and a conceptual overview of existing descriptive, empirical and theoretical literature on re-entry. Broad conceptual frameworks informing the re-entry literature are considered first, then the re-entry literature specifically is explored through affective, behavioural and cognitive domains.

A review of this literature reveals that it is a multi-layered representation of disciplinary and methodological approaches, rendering it impossible to synthesise to a simple list of ‘topics’ to be investigated. Synthesising the literature related to the phenomenon of re-entry is, therefore, a complex process. This complexity is essentially the result of three inter-related factors. The first is re-entry’s inseparable relationship with the cultural adjustment⁴ literature. The second relates to the sheer volume of literature, and the third to the broad disciplinary bases from which re-entry has emerged as a researched phenomenon. These three factors are discussed in detail in the early part of this chapter to establish a context for this literature review.

Having said this, it is possible to offer some overarching, introductory commentary related to the re-entry literature. This will provide a broad descriptive lens through which this literature review can be read. Arguably, the most critical characteristic of the re-entry literature is that it has as its primary focus, white, privileged individuals who have sojourned overseas voluntarily and re-entered voluntarily. Limited exceptions to this focus include an investigation of second generation Turkish migrants returning to Turkey (Sahin, 1990) and political exiles returning to South Africa after the dismantling of Apartheid (Steyn & Grant, 2007). Given this white, privileged, voluntary focus, it is perhaps not surprising that most of

⁴ Although primarily considered in the literature as a psychological concept, the term ‘adjustment’ in this study is used as a generic term to refer to both psychological and social-psychological processes and outcomes of movement between cultures. The interchangeable nature of much of the cross-cultural terminology will be explored more fully in this chapter.

the re-entry literature is written from a predominantly USA perspective, although increasingly, studies are emanating from other countries – New Zealand (Butcher, 2002; Rogers & Ward, 1993), Canada (Adler, 1981; Arthur, 2003; Westwood et al., 1986), Israel (Tannenbaum, 2007), Spain (Vidal et al., 2007) and Japan (Furukawa, 1997; Isogai, Hyashi, & Uno, 1999; Kidder, 1992; Sasagawa, Toyoda & Sakano, 2006). Few studies have emerged from Australia. Those limited few that exist, have either a business (Newton et al., 2007) or returning Asian international student focus (Cannon, 2002; Chur-Hansen, 2004). With a focus on returning Australian university students, this study gives voice to this silence in the literature. A further characteristic of the re-entry literature is that the key subjects of these predominantly USA-based investigations are students and business personnel (Hammer, Hart & Rogan, 1998; Martin & Harrell, 1996). Notably, aside from the role technology has played in changing communication patterns (Cox, 2004), little seems to have changed in terms of these sojourners' descriptions of their re-entry experiences over the last half century during which re-entry has been consistently investigated. Finally, although drawn from a variety of disciplinary bases, re-entry is principally explored, in empirical research particularly, from a psychological perspective. This is a reflection of the broader dominance of psychology in both areas of cross-cultural and intercultural research (van Oudenhoven & Cushner, 2008). These characteristics, combined, have significant implication for interpreting re-entry literature.

What the previous discussion reveals is that the re-entry literature is considered and presented from a very specific and narrow lens. That lens is one that valorises the individual. The focus is on the *self* and individual adjustment. It is reflective of Western, individualistic culture.⁵ The re-entry literature, therefore, reveals significant gaps and silences – namely, non-Western, collectivist cultures, group experiences, involuntary re-entry and sojourners from diverse occupations. This 'narrowness' in the treatment of re-entry is primarily explained by Lonner's and Malpass's (1994) description of the discipline of psychology as both "culture-bound" and "culture-blind" (p.2). In other words, as Eisner (1991) reminds us, "...a way of seeing is also a way of not seeing" (p. 67). Psychology, as a discipline, is a Western construct. Its theoretical and traditional roots are in the Western world; it has been primarily developed, studied and applied in Western contexts. As a phenomenon primarily explored through a psychological lens, it is axiomatic that re-entry research is reflective of this context. Any

⁵ *Individualism* and *collectivism* are terms which refer to the extent to which one defines and locates self in relation to others (Hofstede, 1984). *Individualist* cultures are characterised by competition, the interest of the individual primarily takes precedence over the group, and self-concept is usually separate from group relationships. *Individualism* is characteristic of Western cultures. In *collectivist* cultures the focus is on cooperation rather than competition and the interests of the group normally take precedence over individual needs. Self-concept is inseparable from group relationships and group harmony is maintained at all costs. *Collectivism* is characteristic of most Asian, South American and African cultures (Triandis, 1990).

reading and analysis of the re-entry literature must be made with this limited lens in mind. It is interesting to note, however, that both Kim (2001) and Martin and Harrell (2004) suggest that the emergence of the critical paradigm in culture-related disciplines – with its focus on *macro* issues (historical, social and political) rather than the individual – will exert an increasing influence on cultural adjustment and re-entry research.

This introductory discussion highlights a fundamental issue, an understanding of which is central for both researching in this area and reading the results of that research: that is, the framework within which re-entry as a conceptual phenomenon is investigated and reported, reflects broader conceptualisations of culture. Culture creates a frame through which the world is experienced and understood. Culture shapes knowledge, attitudes and behaviour. As Geertz (1973) suggests, “there is no such thing as a human nature independent of culture” (p. 49). Bodies of knowledge, social relationships and identities that individuals and societies construct are cultural constructions (Berry, 1980); they are not reflective of just personality or “mind” (Hall & Hall, 1974, p. 10). Thus, re-entry experiences, and the interpretation and reporting of those experiences, are reflective of more than individual idiosyncrasies. They are reflective of a world view determined – often unconsciously (Hall, 1959) – by cultural constructs.

Another important part of this introductory discussion relates to methodological approaches in the re-entry literature. It is possible to identify some broad methodological characteristics of the research literature. For example, it is, as highlighted in the introductory chapter, primarily cross-sectional rather than longitudinal. Furthermore, the re-entry literature has been criticised as being predominantly anecdotal and descriptive, lacking rigor, empiricism, theoretical foundation and standardised methods of investigation (Black et al., 1992; Cox, 2004; Kim, 2001; Sussman, 2000). In support of this criticism, an anthology of re-entry literature (291 pieces in total) collated by Austin (1983a) shows that the majority of the literature up to that point had been anecdotal. Recent decades have, however, witnessed a more rigorous approach with increasing focus on empirical investigations and the development of theoretical frameworks relating to re-entry (see, for example, Black et al., 1992; Martin & Harrell, 2004; Smith, 2002b; Sussman, 2000; Vidal et al., 2007). In relation to theory development in the cultural adjustment literature, Ward (2004) supports Furnham’s and Bochner’s (1986) assertion that much of the theory of *culture shock* has been derived from other settings and applied to the phenomenon, rather than arising specifically from it. This same characteristic is evident for re-entry.

Another characteristic of the re-entry methodology, further exemplifying its psychology orientation, is its often predictive nature. While some authors make explicit calls for predictive studies as a way of increasing rigor (Black et al., 1992; Martin, 1984; Sussman, 2000), the significance attached to predictive studies is perhaps best illustrated through the consistent way in which critical variables have been researched (Adler, 1981; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Brabant, Palmer & Gramling, 1990; Cox, 2004; Gama & Pedersen, 1977; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Hammer et al., 1998; Lank, 1985; Martin & Harrell, 1996; Rohrlich & Martin, 1991; Uehara, 1986; Vidal et al., 2007). These variables are generally categorised into three groupings: *pre-existing* or *background* variables, such as age and gender (Church, 1982; Martin, 1984); *host culture* or *situational* variables, such as length of stay and cultural distance (Church, 1982; Martin, 1984; Westwood et al., 1986); and *re-entry* variables, such as spouse adjustment and relationships with family and friends (Martin, 1984). This variables approach illustrates a common aim of much of the re-entry research to seek and predict causal relationships – an aim representative of post-positivist approaches.

Furthermore, re-entry methodology tends to rely almost exclusively on self-reporting. This can give rise to a number of methodological concerns including the reliability and validity of data. Counter-arguments against such concerns will be discussed in Chapter Four. Perhaps predictably, given the empirically supported notion that re-entry is characteristically a difficult time, the literature also tends to focus on the problems associated with re-entry rather than the positive outcomes that can and do emanate from such an experience. Finally, many of the studies of the re-entry experience are presented as ‘outside’ of time.

Thus, re-entry tends to be reported in the literature through two primary frames: descriptive and explanatory, reflecting both the anecdotal, and the empirical and theoretical traditions in the field. These two reporting frames – anecdotal and explanatory – although co-existing over the last half century during which re-entry has been investigated as a phenomenon, reflect distinct chronological patterning: descriptive reporting, reflecting the anecdotal tradition, tended to dominate the early re-entry literature while explanatory reporting, reflecting the empirical and theoretical traditions, has emerged more strongly in more recent decades. This chapter will, in investigating the re-entry-specific literature that has emerged in the last half century, illustrate this developmental nature of methodological approaches to the phenomenon.

Defining terms

The re-entry literature is littered with terminology that reflects its broad disciplinary base. While this diversity adds a richness and depth to the lexicon of re-entry, it also fosters varying interpretations as terms have been ‘borrowed’ and applied in new contexts. For this reason, explicit consideration of terminology use is an important component of this chapter.

A review of the re-entry literature reveals that terminology has been used variably and interchangeably over the last half century and, as new hybrid disciplines have emerged (for example, intercultural communication), the variation in usage of this terminology has become more evident. Numerous terms, for example, have been used by cultural researchers to explain the psychological and social-psychological processes and outcomes that occur when people move between cultures. Some of these terms have been used specifically to refer to *long-term* processes and outcomes, some to *short-term*. Yet there is no consistency. To illustrate this point, terms such as *adjustment*, *adaptation*, *assimilation* and *reacculturation* are often used interchangeably in the re-entry literature, although many writers attest to the distinctness of each of these terms. The outcome of this situation is that, while there are general understandings of the meaning of terms employed in the re-entry literature, there is no consistent usage or interpretation of those terms. Consequently, the possibilities for confusion are legion. While it is not the purpose of this chapter to discuss, in detail, the various interpretations of terminology, it is important to provide working definitions and to justify the selection of terminology employed in this study. What follows then, is a selection of terms that are employed in this study, operational definitions for those terms, and justification for their selection.

Abroad is a generic term used widely in the literature to refer to people’s relocation during cross-cultural experiences (see, for example, Martin, Bradford & Rorlich, 1995; Ward et al., 2001). The term *overseas* is less commonly used (see, for example, Lerstrom, 1995), but I have selected it for this study as I believe the term *abroad* has historical connotations of imperialism. *Overseas* seems a less ‘laden’ term.

Another term commonly used in the literature, and employed in this study, is *sojourner*. Typically, it is used to describe a traveller residing temporarily in a new and unfamiliar environment (see, for example, Arthur, 2003; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Steyn & Grant, 2007; Martin et al., 1995), although ‘temporary’, in the literature, can range from six months to five years (Cox, 2004). Yang (2000) attributes original use of the term to the sociologist Paul Siu who used it initially in 1952 to describe early Chinese immigrants in the USA. These immigrants were perceived by the host culture primarily in a negative light, being

considered utilitarian at best and exploitative at worst, as their primary motivation appeared to be accumulating sufficient wealth to return to their homeland, not assimilating with their host culture. Clearly, the meaning of the term *sojourner* has since been modified in the literature to extend well beyond its original conception of peculiarly Chinese. Yet an important commonality remains – that of temporary residence in an alternative context with intent to return to the home culture. The key difference between the current use of the term and that first suggested by Paul Siu is that it is no longer used pejoratively (Steyn & Grant, 2007). In this study, then, the term *sojourner* is used to describe any traveller living temporarily (for an unspecified amount of time) in a different culture with an intention to return to their home culture.

The terms *adjustment*, *adaptation*, *assimilation* and *reacculturation* appear regularly and interchangeably in the literature to refer to the processes and outcomes of movement between cultures. Kim (1988), for example, refers to *adjustment* as one of three *adaptation* outcomes. Smith (2002a), on the other hand, defines *adjustment* as a short-term process and *adaptation* as a long-term process. Yet, Sussman (2002) differentiates between culture shock as “the process of *adjustment* to the new culture” and reverse culture shock as “the outcome of *adaptation*” (p. 391). Clearly, there is no consistency in the application of these terms in the re-entry literature.

Thus, despite Bochner (1986) rejecting the term *adjustment* on the grounds that it: first, emphasises “...the intra-psychic determinants of behaviour [and] stigmatises those experiencing difficulties ‘adjusting’” (p. 347); and second, has ethnocentrism overtones by implying cultural superiority, it has been selected for use in this study. This is because, as both Martin (1984) and Searle and Ward (1990) claim, the concept of *adjustment* incorporates more than psychological constructs. It also incorporates socio-cultural constructs; it is, then, in essence, both a psychological and sociological term. This present study considers both psychological and socio-cultural aspects of the re-entry phenomenon. Moreover, *adjustment* can be considered as either a state or a process (Vidal et al., 2007). In this study, re-entry is explored as a process. The term *adjustment* clearly has greatest consonance with this study. In this study, then, *adjustment* is used as a generic term to refer to both the psychological and social-psychological processes and outcomes of movement between cultures.

Numerous terms are used in the literature to represent the specific experience of ‘coming home’ (Lank, 1985; Storti, 2001; Werkman, 1980) after an overseas sojourn. These terms include: *cross-cultural re-entry* (Austin, 1986; Brabant et al., 1990; Rogers and Ward, 1993);

culture shock in reverse (Corey, 1979; Howard, 1974); *intercultural re-entry* (Martin, 1986; Martin and Harrell, 2004); *reacculturation* (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Martin, 1984); *readjustment* (Gama and Pedersen, 1977); *re-entry* (Arthur, 2003; Freedman, 1980; La Brack, 1993; Lank, 1985; Sahin, 1990; Sussman, 1986; Weaver, 1994; Westwood et al., 1986; Wilson, 1993c); *re-entry adjustment* (Rorlich and Martin, 1991); *re-entry culture shock* (Uehara, 1986); *re-entry shock* (Kim, 2001; Martin, 1986); *re-migration* (Tannenbaum, 2007); *repatriation* (Hammer et al., 1998); *repatriation adjustment* (Black et al., 1992; Cox, 2004); *repatriation distress* (Sussman, 2002); and *reverse culture shock* (Gaw, 2000; Raschio, 1987). As with other terminology in the re-entry literature, the variation in the use of terms to describe ‘coming home’ is partially reflective of the broad base of the informing disciplines, as well as historical tradition. As an example of this, and also of the complexity of the interdisciplinary nature of terminology use, Gaw (2004) defines *reverse culture shock* as “the process of readjusting, reacculturating and reassimilating into one’s own home culture after living in a different culture for a significant period of time” (pp. 83-84). Aside from the variability inherent in what counts as ‘significant’ (a term also used in Adler’s (1981) definition), Gaw’s (2004) definition includes concepts that are psychological, anthropological and sociological in orientation. The legacy of the broad disciplinary bases from which the re-entry research has emerged is exemplified by this definition. Clearly, selecting a term (and definition) that encapsulates the notion of ‘coming home’, but ameliorates the complexities of cross-disciplinary understandings, is important.

Although Sussman (2000) claims that the term *re-entry* has negative connotations due to its origin in the space program (where space-crafts’ re-entry to the earth’s atmosphere was traumatic and often resulted in disintegration), it has been selected as the preferred term for use in this study. This is because it is essentially generic and avoids the discipline-specific connotations implied by some of the other terms, such as *repatriation* – widely used in business (see, for example, Herman & Tetrick, 2009). Similarly, the term *re-entry* avoids potentially overt negative connotations associated with terms such as *re-entry shock*, *reverse culture shock* and *repatriation distress*.

Re-entry has been variously defined in the literature. Westwood et al. (1986), for example, define it as “the continuum of experience and behaviours which are encountered when an individual returns to a place of origin after having been immersed in another context for a period of time sufficient to cause some degree of mental and emotional adjustment prior to optimal functioning in the ‘new’ environment” (p. 223). Aside from the fact that this definition assumes difficulty in re-entry (when not all sojourners do experience difficulty), it focuses on mental and emotional adjustment, but doesn’t include behaviour adjustments – a

critical element of many re-entries. For the purposes of this study, re-entry is defined as, “the process of reintegration into primary home contexts after an intercultural sojourn”, an intercultural sojourn being defined as “an intensive and extended visit into cultural contexts different from those in which one was socialized” (Martin & Harrell, 1996, p. 307).

Establishing a context for the literature review

The relationship between cultural adjustment and re-entry

The symbiotic relationship between *cultural adjustment* and *re-entry* is the first of three factors that render the task of synthesising the re-entry literature a complex one. While the focus of this particular study is the re-entry experience, and while it is acknowledged that re-entry is a unique phenomenon, it is not possible to investigate this phenomenon as an isolated concept. Conceptual frames for understanding cultural adjustment provide the key to understanding the specific phenomenon of re-entry (Cox, 2004). This is because re-entry is now essentially viewed as one form of cultural adjustment and thus, many of the adjustment patterns and variables that influence cultural adjustment are mirrored in re-entry. Re-entry poses similar challenges – affectively, behaviourally and cognitively – to adjusting to another culture. Both, for example, involve loss and change, a process of adjustment and the employment of coping strategies. An outcome of this is that the dominant characteristics of the cultural adjustment literature (including discipline perspectives, groups of people researched and methodologies) are echoed in the re-entry literature.

This relationship between cultural adjustment and re-entry is intimately related to the notion of re-entry increasingly being considered one part of the *process* of cultural adjustment. This notion of cultural adjustment as a *process*, initially purported over three decades ago (see, for example, Meintel, 1973), has continued to gain momentum over recent decades (Cox, 2004; Gaw, 2000; Hanratty, 2001; Martin & Harrell, 2004; Smith, 2002a; Westwood et. al., 1986). Now, leaving, adjusting and returning are predominantly viewed in the literature as an integrated cycle. According to La Brack (1993), leaving and re-entry are “twin reflections” of the same process (p. 45). Indeed, Gaw (2000) defines “culture shock” (the experience related to adjusting to a new culture) as the “parent construct” of “reverse culture shock” (the experience of re-entering your own culture) (p. 85). Thus, understanding the cultural adjustment process aids in the understanding of the re-entry process.

Notwithstanding the symbiotic relationship between the cultural adjustment and the re-entry literature, there is a limited, but steadily expanding body of literature that deals particularly

with the re-entry experience. From tentative beginnings in the middle of last century, re-entry literature gained significant momentum during the 1980s and continues to expand this century. Moreover, while there are clear similarities between cultural adjustment and re-entry, there are aspects of the re-entry experience that are unique. These unique aspects include: expectations, change in self and environment, level of awareness of that change and responses to those changes (Arthur, 2003; Martin, 1984; Sahin, 1990; Sussman, 1986; Thompson & Christofi, 2006). Thus, in this literature review, the cultural adjustment literature provides an overarching framework within which to explore the specific, unique phenomenon of re-entry.

The expanding volume of literature

The second inter-related factor contributing to the complex task of synthesising the literature is the sheer volume of material written. The bulk of the material written in the field is related to cultural adjustment generally, with the literature pertaining specifically to re-entry being more limited. Although concepts related to cultural adjustment (for example, Durkheim's [1897/1989] notion of *anomie* and Park's [1928] notion of *marginal man*) first appeared in the literature a considerable time ago, the bulk of the research and writing has appeared in the last half century. Ward and Rana-Deuba (1999), for example, refer to the "massive and expanding literature on cross-cultural transition and adjustment" (p. 422). As further evidence of this expansion, Ward et al. (2001) synthesise material from over 1000 sources on culture shock.

Of particular relevance to the emergence of the cultural adjustment literature in the last half century, is the fact that the groups of people who became the focus of research were *temporary* sojourners. In other words, there was an understanding and expectation that they would return, at some time, to their original home. This stands in stark contrast to earlier cultural adjustment research which had a primary focus on migration. Thus, it could be suggested that this increase in the number of temporary sojourners post World War Two, essentially paved the way for not only the identification of re-entry as a unique phenomenon, but also a more consistent investigation of it. Re-entry literature, then, has become an important complement to the more generic cultural adjustment literature which has a focus on permanent adjustment.

The disciplinary bases of the cultural adjustment literature

The broad and diverse range of disciplines from which this body of knowledge has grown is the third factor contributing to the complex nature of synthesising the cultural adjustment – and hence re-entry – literature. While such diversity has undoubtedly added richness and depth to the field, it can also be seen as one of the potential weaknesses rather than strengths of the field. One of the primary reasons for this is that it has essentially created a fragmented approach to the area.

With roots in anthropology (see, for example, Bock, 1970); psychiatry (see, for example, Malzberg, 1940); psychology (see, for example, Holmes & Rahe, 1967; Rotter, 1966); sociology (see, for example, Park, 1928; Stonequist, 1937/1961); and hybrid disciplines such as intercultural communication (see, for example, Brick, 2004; Brislin, 1981); international education (see, for example, Carey, 1956; Tajfel & Dawson, 1965); and international business management (see, for example, Hofstede, 1984), cultural adjustment has been explored from a range of disciplinary perspectives. These disciplinary perspectives – theoretical and methodological – have both strengths as well as weaknesses, and have thus both benefited and diminished research in the area (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). A review of the literature suggests that, of these disciplinary fields, psychology has been the most prolific in the area of cultural adjustment. The subjects of these explorations have been equally diverse – refugees, migrants, indigenous peoples, students, business personnel, missionaries, military personnel, government personnel and Peace Corps workers.

To add further to the diversity of perspectives, these groups have been studied at macro and micro levels (group versus individual adjustment patterns) and from short-term and long-term adjustment perspectives. Thus, the literature in the past has been characterised by often disparate, discrete treatments of the topic with minimal consideration of cross-disciplinary aspects. It has been purported that this “atomistic”, “fragmented” approach to the cultural adjustment literature is one of the major weaknesses with this area of research (see, for example, Kim, 2001, p.xii). There has historically been an absence of a coherent approach that honours the integrative and multi-faceted nature of the process of cultural adjustment, in general, and re-entry, specifically. This literature review, then, intentionally adopts a structure that represents recent attempts in the cross-cultural adjustment field to challenge this fragmented approach and consider the area more holistically.

The structure of this literature review

The previous discussion has essentially foreshadowed and justified the structure of the remainder of this chapter. The remainder of this chapter discusses not only the broader conceptions of cultural adjustment, but specifically the descriptive, empirical and theoretical findings in the field of re-entry and the theories that have influenced that thinking and research. While a number of varying structures have, in the past, been utilised in analysing and presenting the phenomenon of re-entry, this chapter will consider re-entry within the frame of *affective*, *behaviour* and *cognitive* dimensions (Ward et al., 2001) – dimensions that partially reflect the chronological development in thinking and research in the field over the last half century.

Earlier in this chapter, the difficulties associated with the traditional fragmented approach to cultural adjustment were highlighted. One of the first attempts to integrate the multi-disciplinary foundations of the cultural adjustment literature, and thus view the construct more holistically, was by Searle and Ward (1990). They were the first, utilising empirical research, to differentiate between the *psychological* and *socio-cultural* dimensions of adjustment. They claimed that psychological adjustment is best understood within a *stress and coping* framework, whereas socio-cultural adjustment is best understood within both *social learning* and *social cognition* frameworks. A more recent attempt at integration, one which built upon the earlier work of Searle and Ward, has been that of Ward et al. (2001). They claim that the three broad theoretical approaches to exploring cultural adjustment – stress and coping, social learning, and social cognition – are best explored through affective, behaviour and cognitive dimensions. They refer to this as the ABC model of cultural adjustment.

Put simply, the affective dimension explores how people *feel*; the behaviour dimension explores how people *behave*; and the cognitive dimension explores how people *think*. Clearly, the affective and cognitive domains relate more to internal processes, while the behaviour domain relates more to external processes. Ward et al.'s (2001) ABC model is the first comprehensive model to integrate the affective, behavioural and cognitive domains of cultural adjustment. It has been modified and applied to re-entry through the Systems Theory of Intercultural Re-entry (Martin & Harrell, 2004).

The differentiation between affect, behaviour and cognition, exemplified by Ward et al.'s (2001) model, is not new. Applied to cultural adjustment, however, the differentiation is relatively new. Importantly, such a framework allows for a more comprehensive and holistic approach to research in the field. Moreover, such a framework precipitates a move away from

a fundamentally negative, reactive model of cultural adjustment to a more positive, adaptive, proactive, learning model (Ward et al., 2001). The ABC model is now commonly used in the re-entry literature as a way of analysing descriptive, empirical and theoretical contributions to the field (see, for example, Cox, 2004; Martin & Harrell, 2004).

Notwithstanding the previous discussion, it is important to highlight that any division or segregation of the re-entry literature will be essentially artificial and create false boundaries. Although presented structurally in this chapter as discrete sections, the affective, behaviour and cognitive dimensions are not discrete entities. These three dimensions are integrated and overlap. Re-entry doesn't exist in a vacuum; it is a dynamic phenomenon with much interplay between the three domains. As a way of illustrating this point, the way that people cope with change is clearly an affective response, yet cognitive appraisals of that change will vary from individual to individual. Whether this fits more 'neatly' into the affective domain or the cognitive domain is, in a sense, an artificial choice. This difficulty in segregating aspects of the affective, behaviour and cognitive dimension is exemplified by the fact that a number of concepts in this chapter are discussed in more than one domain. What follows in the remainder of this chapter, then, is a discussion of how re-entry has been explored and reported in the literature historically, through affective, behaviour and cognitive domains, reflecting the theoretical traditions of stress and coping, social learning and social cognition, respectively.

Affective dimension

The affective dimension of cultural adjustment refers essentially to psychological well-being and feelings of satisfaction. The affective dimension of cultural adjustment has been consistently documented in literature, both fiction and non-fiction. Lawrence (1926/1935), for example, in recounting his Middle Eastern experiences, refers to a sense of "madness" that he claimed would be near anyone "who could see things through the veils at once of two customs, two educations, two environments" (p. 9). More recently, Storti (2001), while acknowledging the "loneliness" (p. 32) of re-entry, highlights the "new self" that emerges from the experience (p. 65). While these examples are related in that they illustrate the affective dimension of cultural adjustment, they represent two distinct historical phases in the way that the affective dimension of cultural adjustment has been investigated and reported. These two phases are: the early literature which represents a 'medical model', one which pathologises the experience and focusses almost exclusively on the "noxious aspects" (Ward et al., 2001, p. 35); and more recently, a 'psychosocial model' which defines cultural adjustment as 'coping with stress' and, as such, acknowledges cultural adjustment as a

‘transition’ experience which inevitably includes loss and change as well as opportunities for growth.

The psychological impact of re-entry

The cultural adjustment literature has consistently acknowledged the impact on psychological well-being when one moves to a new culture or returns to one’s home culture. Klineberg and Hull (1979), for example, in their study of students adjusting to foreign universities in five different continents, discovered that depression was a significant problem for a large number of the students in all countries in the study. Similarly, “bitterness and disappointment” was a common experience for African, Asian and West Indian students studying in England (Tajfel & Dawson, 1965, p. 2). Uehara (1986) actually *defines* reverse culture shock as “temporal psychological difficulties that a returnee experiences in the initial stage of the adjustment process at home after having lived abroad” (p. 420). In regard to re-entry studies specifically, descriptive, empirical and theoretical reference to the psychological aspect of the experience prevails.

Descriptive studies have consistently captured the psychological impact of re-entry. The early business literature, for example, considers the impact on both the business manager and (typically) his family. To illustrate this point, Howard (1974) refers to the feelings of “insecurity” and “unhappiness” that returning business managers and their spouses are likely to feel in attempting to fit back into the home workplace and renegotiate the domestic side of life in the USA (p. 23). Children, too, are seen as being at risk, suffering as a result of the “uprooting” they experience as they move between education systems (p. 24). Tung (1988), similarly, refers to the experience of settling into a new position and the spouse’s search for a new job, as “traumatic” (p. 241). Frustration is a likely outcome as skills acquired overseas cannot be utilised in positions at home. Corey (1979), likewise, describes the frustration, “personal tension” and “bitterness” that returning Saudi PhD graduates are likely to experience as they face the difficulties of incorporating their newly acquired knowledge and skills into their professions in a developing country (p. 48). More recently, Gregersen and Stroh (1997) report one of their returnee Finnish business managers describing the feeling of being “an alien in [his] own country” (p. 635).

The psychological impact of re-entry on student sojourners has also been described and reported in the literature. Werkman (1980) describes his work as a clinical psychologist with university students (most of whom had spent considerable years living overseas with their parents) and clinical patients seeking help after the emergence of mental health issues on

return from overseas sojourns. Many returnees, according to Werkman (1980), “describe feelings of discomfort and vague dissatisfaction with their lives, though they cannot pinpoint the basis of their difficulty” (p. 12). Such vague dissatisfaction presented itself in his clinical practice far more than traditional psychiatric problems. He lists the main problems faced as: feelings of separation and loss; inability to communicate experience to others; missing the life of fantasy lived overseas; nostalgia for a lost way of life; difficulty in putting down roots; and concerns over the emergence of a new self-concept. “Restlessness”, “loneliness”, “bafflement” and “frustration” are terms used to describe these subjects’ experiences (pp. 11-13). Scheiber (2000), too, describes the re-entry experience of exchange students as lonely, sad and anxiety-ridden, a result of disorientation and the loss of familiar cues. Yet, Hickson (1994) perhaps best captures the psychological impact of re-entry in her description of her own homecoming:

I did not envision any possibility that I would have difficulties in the culture I already knew so well. I did not know that sometimes I would feel uncomfortable and lost in conversations, that encounters would be somehow awkward and stilted, that many exchanges would have the effect of instantly revealing the lack of common points of reference. I did not realise that hardly anyone would pay much attention to the fact of my sojourn and experiences abroad. I did not realize that I would feel like a stranger in a strange land and like an outsider. (p. 255)

These descriptions of the psychological impact of re-entry have been validated through empirical research.

A number of empirical studies highlight the psychological difficulties experienced by students, in particular. In one of the first empirical investigations into re-entry, Uehara (1986) found evidence from her study of North American university students – returning from sojourns in four different continents – to support the claim that the initial stage of re-entry adjustment results in more physiological and psychosocial difficulties than it does for those students who re-locate domestically. She found that changes in students’ value structures were a primary cause of their re-entry difficulties. Furukawa (1997), similarly, in a comparative study with students who had never left Japan, describes the “substantial emotional distress” experienced by returning Japanese exchange students (p. 263). Sahin (1990), too, in his study of second generation Turkish adolescent migrants returning to Turkey after having lived in Europe with their parents, found that all 800 returnees

experienced high levels of depression and anxiety. Indeed, 18 per cent of these students were classified as clinically depressed. As in Uehara's (1986) and Furukawa's (1997) studies, the use of a control group in Sahin's (1990) highlighted the stark contrast between the psychological health and well being of these adolescents with those who had never left Turkey.

Depression was also a common psychological response upon re-entry for the students in Gaw's (2000) USA-based study. As with the students in Sahin's (1990) study, these students were involuntary sojourners; they had lived overseas as a result of their parents' occupations. Approximately 40 per cent of the 66 college students in Gaw's (2000) study listed depression as a 'mild problem', 14 per cent as a 'significant problem' and nearly 10 per cent as a 'severe problem' (p. 95). Similar figures were found to represent loneliness and isolation (p. 95). Those students who experienced higher levels of re-entry shock in Gaw's (2000) study also experienced more personal adjustment problems. The length of time living overseas may be a significant factor in the psychological response from students in both Sahin's (1990) and Gaw's (2000) studies: both groups had lived overseas for significant periods of time with their parents.

Empirical studies related to the psychological impact of re-entry have also focussed on groups other than students. Steyn and Grant (2007), in their study of political exiles returning to South Africa, for example, found that feelings of despondency, alienation, loss, paranoia and confusion led to the re-entry experience being a highly emotional one. Similarly, Tannenbaum (2007) – in his study of Israelis who had migrated to North America, but decided at a later date to return to their home culture – found that subjects reported high levels of distress, anxiety and depression. One subject described the psychological 'noise' in her head as being "like Turkish coffee – you stir it and the grains keep floating instead of sinking" (p. 164). That empirical research has acknowledged the psychological difficulties of re-entry, is not in question.

Theoretical literature has also acknowledged the psychological impact of re-entry. In particular, the early stage and process models such as the W-curve (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963), reflect a preoccupation with this aspect of the experience. Later theoretical models (see, for example, Black et al., 1992) also reflect, but to a lesser degree, the psychological impact of re-entry. Black et al.'s (1992) model is one of the limited number of theoretical models that have arisen from re-entry research rather than being adapted from other theories and applied to re-entry. Isogai et al. (1999) also propose a theoretical training framework for adult Japanese returnees that acknowledges the psychological aspect of re-entry by including

a section specifically related to ‘emotions’. Unlike Black et al.’s (1992) theoretical model, this framework is a hybrid, adapted from other cultural adjustment models and applied to re-entry. The majority of later models, although touching briefly on the psychological impact of re-entry, tend to focus more on the behavioural and cognitive aspects of adjustment (Martin & Harrell, 2004; Smith, 2002b; Sussman, 2000; Vidal et al., 2007).

It is important to remember, though, that not all re-entries are experienced as psychologically difficult or challenging. Brazilian postgraduates returning from study in the USA, for example, felt that they were “coping adequately” (Gama & Pedersen, 1977, p. 46), with the majority of their concerns related to work issues rather than personal issues. Similarly, in contrast to a number of other studies, student sojourners returning to the USA reported positive changes in their relationships with parents and siblings (Martin, 1984). Brabant et al. (1990), too, found that in exploring daily life and the re-entry relationships of students returning to a variety of countries after an international exchange in the USA, no severe readjustment problems were experienced. Napier and Peterson (1991) found also, that while there were some problems encountered upon re-entry by the business personnel in their study, they were not severe. Furthermore, 70 per cent of the exchange students in Rohrich’s and Martin’s study (1991) were positive in their evaluation of return life rather than neutral or negative. Notwithstanding these findings, it appears on the weight of descriptive, empirical and theoretical evidence that psychological difficulties are characteristically encountered upon re-entry.

Early cultural adjustment literature

Although some attention is paid to the behaviour and cognitive dimensions, much of the early cultural adjustment research and writing focusses heavily on the affective dimension of the experience. It represents primarily a “problem-based” approach (Kim, 2001, p. 17) that is characteristically pseudo-medical, reactive and negative. Adjustment is predominantly described or measured in terms of the returnees’ psychological health and well-being. Failure to adjust is considered a personal failure. In other words, the individual is seen as having problems which need to be ‘fixed’. Such a perspective in the early cultural adjustment literature is reinforced by the mental health and migration literature of the time (Furnham & Bochner, 1986).

This focus of the early cultural adjustment writing is clearly reflected in the titles of articles and books: *Cultural Shock: Adjustment to New Cultural Environments* (Oberg, 1960); *Culture Shock, Language Shock, and the Shock of Self-Discovery* (Smalley, 1963); *Disappointed Guests: Essays by African, Asian and West Indian Students* (Tajfel and Dawson,

1965); *Uprooting and After* (Zwingmann and Pfister-Ammende, 1973); *Re-entry Stress: The Pain of Coming Home* (Austin, 1983b); and *Uprooting and Health: Psycho-Social Problems of Students From Abroad* (Zwingmann and Gunn, 1983).

Theoretical models

One of the salient early theoretical models used to describe and explain cultural adjustment from an affective dimension, and one which was later modified for use in explaining and predicting re-entry adjustment, is the U-curve model (Lysgaard, 1955). This theoretical model is based on interviews with 200 Norwegian scholarship grantees returned from study in the USA. The U-curve adjustment model is a process model that describes and predicts cultural adjustment, over time, as essentially occurring in a U shape. An underlying tenet of the U-curve, therefore, is that adjustment occurs in a predictable pattern. That is, the initial stage of interaction is a positive, exciting experience. As the novelty of the “adventurous pleasures” which characterise the first stage wear off, difficulties are encountered (p. 50). Sojourners experience rejection and alienation in this trough, a good deal of which, according to Lysgaard (1955), is related to lack of language proficiency – a belief also espoused by Smalley (1963). Finally, after a “crisis”, sojourners feel better adjusted and become more integrated into the foreign culture (p. 51). The temporal aspect of the U-curve theory is one of its salient features.

Others built upon and developed this notion of a process model, but rather than viewing cultural adjustment as a process, it is described as occurring in more discrete stages (Adler, 1975; Asuncion-Lande as cited in Austin 1983b; Oberg, 1960; Torbiorn, 1982). Oberg, for example, claims four stages exist in culture shock. The first he labels the “honeymoon stage” (p. 178). The second is “characterised by a hostile and aggressive attitude towards the host country” as the sojourner experiences the difficulty of adjusting to an unfamiliar culture; it is this stage that characterises most strongly the notion of “culture shock” (p. 178). In the third stage the sojourner adopts a “superior attitude” to the host country and is “on the way to recovery” (p. 179). The fourth stage is one of acceptance where the host culture is no longer seen as a threat (p.179).

Adler (1975), on the other hand, identifies five discrete stages: contact, disintegration, reintegration, autonomy and independence (pp. 16-18). He does, in contrast to other contemporary writers, suggest that, although culture shock has predominantly “negative consequences”, it can lead to “cultural learning, self-development and personal growth” (p. 14). This is where Adler’s (1975) model digresses from the other early stage models: he identifies culture shock as a transition experience and his last stage is one of growth, positive

development and self-actualisation. Furthermore, unlike earlier U-curve studies, Torbiorn (1982) and Adler (1975) do not attempt to attach time sequences to their models. These process and stage models then, most of which have an emphasis on the affective dimensions of cultural adjustment, dominate much of the early literature.

The above discussion has direct relevance for reviewing the re-entry-specific literature. This is because the U-curve theory of cultural adjustment was extended and applied specifically to re-entry. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) were the first to empirically investigate and report on the phenomenon of re-entry. It is arguably the most significant theoretical contribution to the early literature on re-entry. Drawing on findings from their earlier interviews and questionnaires (1956, 1958 and 1960) with American grantees – both students and faculty staff – Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) posit that the cycle of adjustment during re-entry essentially mirrors the initial cycle of cultural adjustment. Thus, they forward the W-curve theory based on the belief that the U-curve cycle of adjustment forwarded by Lysgaard (1955) is repeated on re-entry to the home environment. Reinforcing the notion of the negative, problem-based models described earlier, Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) refer to cultural adjustment as an “anomic period” (p. 38) and make specific reference to “alienation, “anomie”, “rejection” (p. 33) and “nostalgia” (p. 40) in their descriptions of cultural adjustment. The W-curve model is the first example in the literature of cultural adjustment theories and models being modified and applied to re-entry.

In later studies of re-entry not specifically representative of stage or process models, the negative, pseudo-medical association with adjustment is still evident. Austin (1983b), for example, cites a Master’s study by Moore in which missionaries identified “nostalgia and homesickness” (for the mission field) as the second most difficult problem associated with re-entry (p. 126). Westwood et al. (1986) report undergraduate international students experiencing “resentment, anger and frustration” upon return to their various home cultures (p. 229). Much of this negative sentiment was related to difficulties in adjusting to others’ expectations of them, renewing relationships with family and friends, and the cognitive dissonance felt in trying to balance new ways of perceiving the world with old. Leaving behind a “rich and emotionally satisfying way of being without having any certainty that this would be replaced by anything positive” also contributed to these students’ distress on re-entry (p. 229). These findings were echoed in a study by Raschio (1987). In Westwood et al.’s (1986) study, the re-entry experience itself is described as “possibly more traumatic” than adjustment to the overseas culture (p. 221). This use of language further reinforces the early negative, pathologised interpretation of cultural adjustment and re-entry. Psychological

well-being and feelings of satisfaction were clearly the focus of this phase in the literature. Behaviour and cognition received scant attention.

The U-curve model and its sister concept, the W-curve, have had, and continue to have, “intuitive appeal” (Martin and Harrell, 2004, p. 313), “heuristic convenience” (Pedersen, 1995, p. 11) and, according to Torbiorn (1982), empirical support. Thus, it is not uncommon to find references to the U-curve and W-curve theories in more recent literature (Arthur, 2003; Nolan, 1990; Storti, 2001). However, critics abound (Adler, 1981; Church, 1982; Klineberg and Hull, 1979; Steyn & Grant, 2007; Ward, 2004; Ward et al., 2001; Ward, Okura, Kennedy & Kojima, 1998). In particular, Adler (1981), Klineberg and Hull (1979), Ward et al. (1998) and Wilson (1993c) found no empirical evidence to support the W-curve theory in their studies. Criticism of the U/W-curve models exists primarily in relation to the consistency with which the stages are experienced, the timing of the stages and the cross-sectional nature of the approaches that led to the theory formations. Adler (1981), for example, reports that during re-entry her subjects experienced “moods” in a flat L shape rather than a U-curve, with any ‘highs’ experienced lasting less than a month and, for some, just a few hours (pp. 344-345). Steyn and Grant (2007) also criticise the W-curve because of the assimilationist assumptions inherent in such a model. Such concerns have led to criticisms of the U-curve and W-curve models as “weak, inconclusive and over-generalised” and “so flexible as to be meaningless” (Church, 1982, pp. 542-543). Furthermore, Ward et al. (2001) raise concern about the “questionable theoretical underpinnings” of the U/W-curve phenomenon, claiming that considerable research suggests that the initial stages of immersion in another culture are characterised by stress and adjustment difficulties, not euphoria (p. 543). It is not surprising, therefore, that Ward et al. (2001) view cultural adjustment as occurring in a more linear progression. Thus, although recent research tends to challenge these early cultural adjustment models, they are still, at times, validated in contemporary re-entry literature.

Patterns are evident in the methodological approaches of this early literature. Early empirical research, although presented as a ‘medical model’, almost exclusively employed qualitative methodologies - interviewing, in particular (see, for example, Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Lysgaard, 1955). Descriptive and anecdotal approaches dominated the early literature (see, for example, Corey, 1979; Howard, 1974; Schuetz, 1945). As predictive studies have emerged, questionnaires and surveys (at times employing psychometric instruments) – often combined with interviews – have become more popular methodologies (see, for example, Adler, 1981; Furukawa, 1997; Gaw, 2000; Hammer et al., 1998; Rogers & Ward, 1993).

More recently, there has been a distinct move away from the predominantly medically-based approach to the affective dimension of cultural adjustment. This trend is identified in the

literature as the psychosocial model (see, for example, Searle & Ward, 1990). The medical model has been criticised because of its focus on the pathological aspects of emotional disorder rather than the positive, potentially growthful aspects; it is “counter-productive and misleading, ...an unfortunate result of the desire of many sojourners to have a simple formula” for dealing with culture shock (Weaver, 1993, p. 193). The affective domain of cultural adjustment now more commonly focusses on coping with stress. The basis of this stress and coping theoretical framework is threefold. First, cultural adjustment is considered to be one form of change. Second, any change is inherently stressful. Third, coping strategies are employed to manage that stress (Ward et al., 2001). The stress and coping framework, then, positions adjustment as a *transition* process. This theoretical tradition draws heavily upon the work of Holmes and Rahe (1967) and Lazarus and Folkman (1984).

Holmes and Rahe (1967), in their seminal work which introduces the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS), purport a direct link between stressful life events and illness. They claim that life events which inevitably involve change (for example, death of a spouse, divorce, moving house, changing jobs), and the emotional stress brought on by such changes, are linked to the onset of disease. Participants in their study were asked to rate life events in terms of their perceived intensity (i.e. the *amount* and *duration* of change in one’s usual life pattern that occurred as a result of these changes). Perhaps predictably, divorce, marital separation and incarceration were rated first, second and third, respectively, on a list of 43 life events. This study has direct relevance to cultural adjustment.

The relevance of Holmes’s and Rahe’s (1967) study to cultural adjustment (re-entry specifically) is two-fold. First, on a conceptual level, it suggests a direct relationship between change in one’s life and potential emotional, physical and psychological effects. “Change in living conditions” and “change in residence”, for example, were ranked as numbers 28 and 32, respectively, on the SRRS. For people in cross-cultural transition – adjusting to life overseas and then readjusting upon return to their home culture – the link here is clear: they face a significant number of life changes and these life changes are likely to be a direct drain on their adjustive resources and their capacity to cope.

Second, on a methodological level, Holmes’s and Rahe’s (1967) study has had a direct impact on cultural adjustment studies in that their SRRS has been modified for use in cultural adjustment studies. The Cultural Readjustment Rating Scale (CRRS), for example, was developed by Spradley and Phillips (1972). They created a list of 33 cultural differences (including, for example, “the language spoken”, “the type of food eaten”, “ideas about what is funny”, how parents treat children”) and asked returned Peace Corps volunteers and

Chinese foreign students, along with US students with no intercultural experience, to rank the relative amount of adjustment required for each cultural difference. While Spradley and Phillips (1972) claim that their study indicates the existence of “universal stressors common to all mankind” (p. 527), Ward et al. (2001) suggest that there are only moderate relationships between the adjustment rankings when compared between the three groups, highlighting the need for “culture-appropriate norms for the study of groups in transition” (p. 74). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) also question whether or not life events need to be “major” in order to create stress and impair health. This perhaps contributes to an understanding of why the CRRS, in its original form, has not been consistently utilised in cultural adjustment studies since.

Although life events, as such, have not therefore been the specific focus of subsequent cross-cultural adjustment studies, other psychometric scales designed to measure psychological adjustment during cross-cultural transitions have been consistently applied and adapted for use in studies of cultural adjustment in general, and re-entry specifically. These include: the Psychological Adjustment Scale (Searle & Ward, 1990); Personal Problems Inventory and Reverse Shock Scale (Gaw, 2000); and Beck Depression Inventory and Spielberger’s State Anxiety Inventory (Rogers & Ward, 1993; Sahin, 1990). This reluctance in accepting response to life events as the central focus in cultural adjustment studies has been partially explained by Furnham and Bochner (1986). They suggest that life events are just one part of understanding psychological well-being of sojourners and therefore call for more consistent consideration of situational factors, personality factors and coping styles in any analysis of affective adjustment.

As with Holmes and Rahe (1967), Lazarus’s and Folkman’s (1984) theoretical work has informed cultural adjustment studies. The basis of Lazarus’s and Folkman’s (1984) work is that stress is considered a normal part of the human condition and that individuals’ coping strategies are what make the difference in the adaptational outcomes of stress. Coping strategies can be problem-focussed (managing the environment causing the stress) or emotion-focussed (regulating emotions towards the problem causing the stress). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) dismiss the traditional non-cognitive models used to explain stress and suggest rather, that cognitive appraisal of a stressful situation will impact more directly on the outcome. Cognitive appraisal, in turn, is affected by commitments and beliefs such as perceived capacity to control events. In a recent Australian study of business returnees, the relationship between an emotion-focussed coping strategy and repatriation adjustment was found to be uniformly negative, something the authors claim is consistent with findings in other environments (Herman & Tetrick, 2009). Levels of social support networks, too, have significant impact on people’s capacity to cope, according to Lazarus and Folkman (1984).

Clearly, cognitive appraisals and coping strategies are partially culture-bound. What might be considered an appropriate emotion-focussed coping strategy in one culture may not be considered so in another. Butcher's (2002) broad-scale interview study, for example, portrays the difficulties experienced by South East Asian graduates, returning from study in New Zealand, in expressing their grief publicly in their Confucian heritage cultures. He describes their re-entry grief as "disenfranchised" as it wasn't publicly recognised or accepted (p. 354). This is reflective of what Markus and Kitayama (1991) would refer to as an *interdependent construal of self*. The stress, appraisal and coping work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984), then, is related to re-entry specifically through investigations of individuals' levels of stress, their coping strategies and their cognitive appraisals of situations when returning to their home culture.

As previously mentioned, one of the key aspects that differentiates the psychosocial model from the early cultural adjustment literature is that, while acknowledging the genuine difficulties and negative outcomes often associated with cultural adjustment, there is recognition of the positive outcomes that can also occur through self-development and personal growth. This potential, Meintel (1973) refers to as "possibilities for exhilaration" (p. 48). Adler (1975) is the first to describe this as a transitional experience where one moves from "a state of low self and cultural awareness to a state of high self and cultural awareness" (pp. 14-15). J. Bennett (1977), like Adler, refers to "transition shock" as an opportunity for personal development (p. 45). Similarly, Furnham and Bochner (1986) acknowledge that despite the inherent difficulties, sojourning "makes a person more adaptable, flexible, and insightful" (p. 47). Kim, (2001), too, sees cultural adjustment as "both problematic and growth producing" (p. 21). This notion of cultural adjustment as a transition process that involves both loss and change has been underscored in the re-entry literature.

A number of re-entry researchers make specific reference to the transitional experience of returning to one's home culture. Westwood et al. (1986) define re-entry as a "transitional process with attendant problems" (p. 222). They describe, justify and report on a program designed to help college students develop strategies for dealing with such problems. Uehara (1986), in a more positive orientation, refers to "re-entry transition as a learning experience". The results of her comparative investigation into the re-entry experiences of 58 USA students returning from study in a Canadian university indicate that the majority of those students perceived their experience as growthful. They reported learning a good deal about their own culture, the host culture and themselves. Similarly, Wilson (1993c), in her large-scale questionnaire and interview study of 272 high school students returning to the USA, found

that the majority of her subjects grew as they struggled with the re-entry experience. Subjects “re-migrating” to Israel in Tannenbaum’s (2007) study, claimed they would be willing to repeat the stressful re-entry process “in return for its rewards” (p. 170).

Smith (2002b), too, assumes that re-entry is a transition which “has potential for both pain and growth” (p. 304). She suggests that the difficulties of re-entry can inspire people to make significant changes in their lives, including relationships. Interestingly, Smith (2002a), in a deliberate attempt to avoid any negativity associated with use of the term “coping strategies”, prefers the term “strategies for facilitating growth” (p. 253). Clearly, there has been a move away from the early focus on re-entry as a predominantly negative experience to one more representative of possibilities for growth and change. Yet, it is important to remember that not all sojourners will experience re-entry as positive and growthful (see, for example, Christofi & Thompson, 2007). As already discussed, re-entry is a complex phenomenon encompassing affective, behaviour and cognitive dimensions. Whether re-entry is experienced as an opportunity for self-development and growth is a complex interplay between micro (individual) and macro (situational) level characteristics.

Individual characteristics

As in much of the cultural adjustment literature, anecdotal evidence and “armchair theorizing” abound in regard to the relationship between personality traits and cultural adjustment (Ward et al., 2001, p. 83). Yet there is a limited number of empirical studies that either investigate this relationship comprehensively, or that are reliably predictive. The results of these empirical studies that have been carried out are mixed, a limited number of which refer to re-entry specifically.

The “Big Five” is the term given to the contemporary psychology personality traits of neuroticism, openness, conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness (Ward, Leong & Low, 2004). The “Big Five” have been explored in regard to their potential relationship with cultural adjustment. Ward et al. (2004), for example, in their study of both Singaporean and Australian students, and Australian and Chinese expatriates, found a direct relationship between four of the personality traits – neuroticism, conscientiousness, extraversion and agreeableness – and psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. The authors claim that it was “not surprising” that neuroticism was the most strongly related to adjustment (p. 145). This finding supports an earlier re-entry study by Furukawa (1997) who discovered that neuroticism was a significant predictor of mental health problems of returning Japanese exchange students. Furukawa (1997) discovered that the greatest predictor of maladjustment during re-entry, was maladjustment during the initial sojourn, suggesting that personality

traits will directly influence one's ability to cope in a new environment. Furukawa (1997) posits that this is logical because "healthy, adaptive and flexible people" tend to remain so even under challenging conditions (p. 266).

In terms of extraversion, Searle and Ward (1990) discovered that this personality trait was conducive to psychological well-being in their study of Malaysian and Singaporean students studying in New Zealand. Yet, these findings are not consistent. Armes and Ward (1989), for example, previously discovered that in their study of English-speaking expatriates in Singapore, extraversion was related to significant levels of psychological distress. This illustrates the claim made earlier in this chapter about the mixed results of investigations into the relationship between personality and adjustment. No empirical study of re-entry, to date, directly links extraversion with psychological well-being.

Personality traits other than the "Big Five" have also been investigated in the cross-cultural literature. Locus of control, for example, is one characteristic that has been consistently related to cultural adjustment processes and outcomes. Initially proposed by Rotter (1966), locus of control refers to the degree to which one perceives negative or positive events as being related to one's own behaviour and characteristics. *Internal* locus of control identifies internal factors such as personality, skills or attitudes as the key determinants of the quality of experience. *External* locus of control, on the other hand, identifies external factors such as other people, fate, chance or luck as the key determinants of the quality of experience. *Fatalism* and *instrumentalism* are terms used synonymously with external locus of control and internal locus of control, respectively, (Furnham, 1997). Cultural adjustment literature has consistently shown a strong correlation between internal locus of control and psychological well-being (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Ward et al., 2004). In terms of re-entry specifically, the link between locus of control and adjustment has been minimally investigated, making any predictive claims about the relationship necessarily cautious.

As further empirical evidence of the way in which individual characteristics can affect the psychological impact of re-entry, both Adler (1981) and Lank (1985) found that those people who were happy and satisfied with life prior to their overseas sojourn, tended to be happier and more successful on re-entry. It is clear that individual characteristics do play some part in cultural adjustment.

Situational characteristics

It has been suggested by a number of authors that personality factors alone cannot account for people's level of adjustment; situational factors must also be taken into account (Church,

1982; Ward & Chang, 1997; Ward et al., 2004). This claim has been supported empirically. In a survey study of 44 returning USA business managers, for example, it was found that those who experienced distress upon re-entry attributed their distress to situational factors, not psychological factors (Hammer et al., 1998). In the cultural adjustment literature, claims of the importance of situational factors have led to explorations of the “cultural fit” hypothesis – a belief that adjustment is partially determined by the degree of “fit” (or cultural distance) between the host culture and the home culture (Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward & Chang, 1997). Some support was found for the “cultural fit” hypothesis in Ward’s and Chang’s (1997) study of American expatriates in Singapore. Yet, no evidence was found in support of the hypothesis in Ward et al.’s (2004) later study of Singaporean students in Australia and Australian expatriates in Singapore. Clearly, cultural distance does have some capacity to impact on the psychological health and well-being of sojourners. It also has a capacity to impact on sojourners’ ability to learn and apply new social skills and behaviours. One aspect of situational characteristics that is particularly pertinent to this affective section, however, relates to social support.

In general, findings from research suggest that social support correlates positively with improved adjustment outcomes (Furnham, 1997). This has been confirmed by empirical studies in regard to re-entry specifically. Lank (1985), Martin (1986) and Wilson (1985), for example, all found that re-entry was easier for those people who were ‘accepted’ in their home cultures and received emotional support from family and friends, despite any changes they may have undergone in their personalities or value systems. Furthermore, where returnees establish or maintain relationships with others who have been overseas, and therefore ‘understand’ what the returnee is experiencing, adjustment tends to be easier (Lank, 1985; Raschio, 1987). Similarly, a number of studies have shown that where a spouse adjusts well upon re-entry, the returnee’s experience is likely to be more positive (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997).

In an inverse relationship, those who had little social support experienced increased difficulty upon re-entry. Adler (1981), Bossard and Peterson (2005), Butcher (2002), Clague and Krupp (1979), Howard (1974), Raschio (1987) and Tung (1988) all discovered that where people at home didn’t value the returnee’s overseas experience – including their newly acquired skills – re-entry was considered more difficult. In particular, Bossard and Peterson (2005) and Raschio (1987) identified the difficulties associated with people at home ‘not listening’ to returnees’ stories.

In a similar vein, increased difficulty upon re-entry seems to be positively correlated with the existence of strong social relationships in the host culture. Although there are some exceptions (Adler, 1981; Hammer et al., 1998), in the main, those people who immersed themselves in the host culture – for example, lived with families while overseas, integrated in their daily and social lives, and formed strong relationships – found re-entry difficult (Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Lank, 1985; Rohrlach & Martin, 1991; Sussman, 1986). Social support networks, then, can either facilitate or hinder the process of readjustment for sojourners.

Coping strategies

The cultural adjustment literature highlights a range of coping strategies that people employ during cross-cultural transitions. Empirical research suggests that these coping strategies can, as with social support networks, either hinder or facilitate the adjustment process (Adler, 1981; Berry & Annis, 1974; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Cox, 2004; Thompson & Christofi, 2006). Berry (1974) differentiates between two dimensions of acculturation, one which involves maintenance of original cultural identity and the other which involves maintenance of relationships with other groups. The relative balance between these two dimensions results in four possible behavioural outcomes or strategies: *marginalisation*⁶, where sojourners reject both the home and the host culture; *separation*, where the home culture is maintained to the exclusion of the host culture; *assimilation*, where relations with the host culture are maintained at the expense of the home culture (sometimes referred to as ‘going native’); and *integration*, where both the home and the host culture are maintained. Each of these strategies has a direct and distinctive impact upon sojourners’ level of adjustment, socially and psychologically. In short, both marginalisation and separation are associated with high levels of acculturative stress, integration with the lowest. The degree of stress experienced is, then, according to Berry (1974), directly attributable to the sojourners’ choice of strategy. Researchers have modified and extended Berry’s work and applied it specifically to the phenomenon of re-entry.

Coping strategies have received considerable attention in the re-entry-specific literature. Adler (1981) was the first re-entry researcher to develop a model to describe and explain coping strategies. It is significant because it draws upon the earlier work of Berry (1974) and provides a basis for future investigation of re-entry coping strategies. Adler (1981) posits that people adopt one of four coping strategies. These coping strategies are a combination of an ‘overall’ attitude – defined as either *optimistic* or *pessimistic* – and a ‘specific’ attitude –

⁶ Marginalisation, as it relates to identity, will be discussed in more detail in the cognitive dimension section of this chapter.

defined as *passive* (no attempt to change self or home environment) or *active* (attempt to change self and home environment).

The first coping strategy Adler (1981) labels *proactive* (a combination of optimistic and active), where there is an attempt to integrate the home and the host culture during re-entry; the second, *resocialised* (a combination of optimistic and passive), where there is an attempt to remove themselves completely from the host culture; the third, *alienated* (a combination of pessimistic and passive), where there is an attempt to dissociate themselves from the home culture, including the workplace, upon re-entry; and the fourth, *rebellious* (a combination of pessimistic and active), where there is an attempt to control the home culture at re-entry.

51 per cent of returnees in Adler's study were classified as *resocialised*, 25 per cent as *proactive*, 12 per cent *alienated* and 12 per cent *rebellious*. Adler claims that this is not an unexpected distribution given corporations' tendencies to adopt favourable attitudes towards employees who assimilate easily into the organisation. It appears from this study that recognition and appreciation of cross-cultural learnings are not universal. The broad similarities between Adler's (1981) categories and those of Berry (1974) are clear, adding strength to the claim that re-entry is one form of cultural adjustment.

The findings from Adler's (1981) study are confirmed in recent studies by Thompson and Christofi (2006) and Christofi and Thompson (2007). Thompson and Christofi (2006) conducted a small-scale in-depth interview study with graduate students returning to live in Cyprus after having studied in various locations around the world. They found that all eight students interviewed adopted either a *proactive* or *resocialised* approach, described by the authors as "more healthy" approaches (p. 35). In a follow up study, Christofi and Thompson (2007) conducted another eight in-depth interviews, this time with graduate students from Liberia, Germany, Russia and Cyprus who, after returning to their home cultures, decided to return to live permanently in their host culture. Despite being offered the opportunity in the interview to discuss their permanent return to the host country, all students chose to focus on the re-entry experience to their home culture, the implication being that their re-entry experience was the more profound of the two transitions.

Most of the findings from the 2007 study are consonant with Thompson's and Christofi's (2006) earlier study. For example, descriptions of the experience focus on: comparing the host culture with the home culture; the unexpectedness of reverse culture shock; the cognitive dissonance experienced as a result of the difference between the two cultures; the difficulties associated with expectations not being met; the greater freedom in the host culture; the

awareness of change in themselves as well as those at home; and the feeling of being ‘marginals’ in their home culture. What *is* different, however, is the choice of coping strategy. All eight participants in this 2007 study adopted the two *pessimistic* coping strategies identified by Adler (1981) – that of the *alienated* or the *rebellious* re-enterer. Both the *alienated* and the *rebellious* re-enterer react negatively to their home culture, contributing to the explanation of these students’ choice to return to their host culture to live.

Clearly, these students were unable to experience re-entry as an opportunity for positive growth. This stands in stark contrast to the high school exchange students interviewed and surveyed in Wilson’s (1993c) study who were “positively proactive and able to grow” during re-entry (p. 484). Age may play a part in this comparison, with the younger students’ value systems and identities potentially more fluid and adaptable than the older graduates. Interestingly, empirical studies of the relationship between age and re-entry difficulties have resulted in mixed findings. While some have found that older sojourners experience less re-entry difficulty (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Uehara, 1986), others have found no supporting evidence for this (Brabant et al., 1990; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Hammer et al., 1998).

Coping strategies have also been interpreted in the re-entry literature at a pragmatic level. Weaver (1994), for example, in a descriptive piece, refers to: “decompression” (a short term stay midway between the host and the home culture locations), a strategy similarly suggested by Austin (1983b); “communication outlets” (conversing with fellow travellers); “stress management” (exercise and diet); and “cues and reinforcers” (artefacts from the host culture) as useful strategies for minimising the difficulties associated with re-entry (pp. 235-236). Storti (2001) additionally highlights the importance of identifying and tying up any “loose ends” in the host culture prior to departure in order to facilitate the re-entry transition (p. 37). Such pragmatic coping strategies tend to be woven into intercultural training.

Choice, and concomitant impact of coping strategies, clearly has a direct link with levels of sojourner readjustment. Of significance is the fact that it seems, from the empirical studies considered above, that a sojourner’s chosen strategy may not necessarily be solely reflective of that individuals’ preference; it may be in response to significant others’ perceived preferences. The coping strategy chosen by the sojourner can, then, reflect a social dimension as much as an individual one. Over two decades ago, Martin (1984), in her seminal theoretical paper on re-entry, called for coping strategies to be investigated more thoroughly in relation to re-entry, specifically. This call has been partially fulfilled. In the same paper,

Martin also foreshadowed the application of the social learning model to the phenomenon of re-entry – the next section to be discussed in this chapter.

Summary

The affective dimension of cultural adjustment, with its focus on psychological health and well-being, has been consistently explored and discussed in the literature. Descriptive, empirical and theoretical literature suggests that sojourners characteristically experience psychological difficulties upon re-entry. Individual factors such as personality and coping strategies, along with situational factors such as social support, can either facilitate or hinder psychological adjustment. The affective dimension of cultural adjustment dominated the early cultural adjustment research and writing. Yet, having progressed from a purely ‘medical model’ to a psychosocial model, its focus now tends to be within a stress and coping theoretical framework. In more recent cultural adjustment literature, the prevailing affective dimension has been balanced by research into the behaviour and cognitive dimensions.

Behaviour dimension

The behaviour dimension of cultural adjustment draws upon the theoretical traditions of social learning. The social learning model of cultural adjustment emerged in response to the medical model that dominated much of the early cultural adjustment literature. Accordingly, it has occupied a consistent place in the literature over the last three decades (Bochner, 1986; Furnham, 1993, 1997; Furnham & Bochner, 1982, 1986; Ward et al., 2001; Ward et al., 2004). The social learning model is a more positive, proactive conceptualisation of cultural adjustment (Cox, 2004). It does not, as the medical model does, conceptualise cultural adjustment as an illness or personal inadequacy, but rather conceptualises it as *learning*. Such learning can be acquired experientially through cross-cultural experiences with host cultural nationals, or vicariously through training. The social learning model has as its focus of investigation, those factors that facilitate or hinder cultural learning. Consequently, communication competence (verbal and non-verbal), cultural distance, length of residence overseas, quality and type of contact with the host culture, previous experience overseas and cross-cultural training are all explored in the literature as representative of this model.

The social learning model, then, perceives cultural adjustment as “a set of learnable social skills” (Furnham, 1997, p. 347). It has as a basic premise the notion that adjusting to a new culture is intimately related to the learning of new knowledge, skills and behaviours. Adjustment problems occur, according to the proponents of the social learning model,

because of difficulties in managing everyday social encounters (Searle & Ward, 1990). Sojourners, for example, are often not aware that a cultural ‘rule’ exists until they break it. This focus on *skills* rather than *values* in the social learning model, distinguishes it explicitly from the cognitive dimension of cultural adjustment. Whereas, the affective and cognitive dimensions of cultural adjustment are concerned more with *internal* processes of the sojourner, the behaviour dimension is concerned primarily with *external* behaviours.

That cultures have varying codes of behaviour and models of social interaction (Brislin, 1993; Hall, 1959; O’Sullivan, 1994) is one of the assumptions inherent in the social learning model. Such variance can be troublesome for sojourners as they attempt to navigate the new rules of a new culture, often rendering previously socially competent adults into something more like ineffective children (Brick, 2004). The intricacies of interpersonal communication are particularly problematic. The expanding volume of literature aimed at explaining such cultural difference and ‘training’ people in these behaviours and skills is testimony to the social learning model belief that these things can actually be learnt (see, for example, Brislin, Cushner, Cherrie & Yong, 1986; Furnham, 1993; O’Sullivan, 1994). Yet, as highlighted by Hall (1959), identifying such difference isn’t always a straightforward task: “culture hides much more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants” (p. 53).

The social learning model has been heavily influenced by the work of Argyle (1969) and Bandura (1977). Argyle (1969) defines social interaction as a mutually skilled performance. He sees social interaction as a set of social skills, the inference being that they can, therefore, be learned or acquired through training like any other skill and subsequently applied to the workplace or everyday life. Most social problems, according to Argyle, “...consist of the breakdown of communication, interaction and cooperation...” (p. 13). Bandura (1977), complementing the ideas of Argyle, claims that social learning occurs through observing and modelling from the behaviours of others.

Learning would be exceedingly laborious, not to mention hazardous, if people had to rely solely on the effects of their own actions to inform them what to do. Fortunately, most human behavior is learned observationally through modelling: from observing others one forms an idea of how new behaviors are performed, and on later occasions this coded information serves as a guide for action. (p. 22)

The direct applicability of Argyle's (1969) and Bandura's (1977) ideas to cultural adjustment – including re-entry – is most apparent.

Just as the W-curve theory extends the U-curve theory of cultural adjustment to re-entry, so, too, does the social learning model of cultural adjustment 'repeat' itself upon re-entry. Put simply, in order to adjust well to a new culture, sojourners must learn new skills and behaviours relevant to that culture. This implies that sojourners will observe, practise and learn new ways of being. The social learning model suggests that sojourners are familiar with patterns of adjustment and social learning and should, as a result, be more adept at navigating the social, economic and political milieu of not only their host culture, but their home culture as well. Yet, empirical research does not consistently support this. Some results appear almost counter-intuitive. For example, some studies show that the more successful the adjustment overseas, the more difficult the re-entry experience (Hammer et al., 1998; Napier & Peterson, 1991). A number of factors, peculiar to re-entry, help explain this apparent anomaly.

Sojourners undergo considerable change in order to adjust successfully to a new culture. Usually, the greater the cultural distance between the home culture and the host culture, the greater the degree of change experienced (Storti, 2001; Weaver, 1994). This change can relate to values, attitudes, beliefs, skills and behaviours. The severity of re-entry difficulties is purported to be directly related to the magnitude of change the sojourner has undergone (Martin, 1984; Smith, 2002a). Yet, sojourners themselves are often not aware of the changes they undergo, nor are they always aware of changes that have occurred at home during their absence (Freedman, 1980; Howell, 2002; Martin, 1984; Scheiber, 2000; Schuetz, 1945; Smith, 2002b; Sussman, 1986). Moreover, people at home are, in the main, not expecting to welcome home 'changed' relatives and friends (Freedman, 1980; Martin, 1984, 1986; Smith, 2002b; Sussman, 1986; Thompson & Christofi, 2006; Weaver, 1994). Sojourners, returning home, then, are faced with the difficult choice of either 'unlearning' recently learned skills and behaviours and reverting to prior attitudes and values, or managing the contested terrain that characteristically results from behaving and thinking at odds with others in the home culture.

One area of specific change that is widely reported in the re-entry literature relates to personal and professional skills. Subjects in Adler's (1981) study, for example, did not feel that their newly acquired skills and knowledge were valued or accorded due respect by the home culture work organisation – a finding that has been replicated in a number of other studies investigating: the experience of business personnel returning to work in their home culture

(Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Clague & Krupp, 1978; Osland, 1995; Tung, 1998; Vidal et al., 2007); senior lecturers returning to university positions in the USA (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963); Vietnamese academics returning to work in universities after study in the USA (Overland, 2008); graduate professionals returning to work in Indonesia (Cannon, 2000); and students returning to their educational institutions (Howell, 2002; Mendelson et al., 2006; Wilson, 1993a). Rather, “colleagues seem[ed] to expect returnees to relearn the ways of [those] who ha[d] never been overseas (Adler, 1981, p. 351). Numerous studies indicate that the greater the acknowledgement of new skills and knowledge, the easier the re-entry adjustment (Adler, 1981; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Osland, 1995; Vidal et al., 2007).

Changed or unpredictable behaviour of sojourners can cause anxiety in the home culture for family, friends and colleagues. In such cases, these people characteristically make trait attributions about the returnee (e.g. “irritable”) rather than situational attributions and furthermore, will attribute the cause of their own discomfort to the returnee (Brislin, 1981; Freedman, 1980). The ultimate outcome of such a situation is misunderstanding through miscommunication.

In essence, returnees are (at least temporarily) different – behaviourally and cognitively – to those at home (Sussman, 1986). Thus, sojourners are faced with the challenge of ‘relearning’ the values, attitudes, beliefs, skills and behaviours of their home culture upon re-entry, thus regaining the “functional fitness” they once had in their home culture (Martin & Harrell, 2004, p. 315). This is, essentially, an extension of the social learning model as applied to re-entry adjustment. Understood through the social learning model, then, the apparent counter-intuitive nature of some of the research findings becomes understandable. Re-entry is characteristically a difficult time as both the returnees and their family, friends and colleagues at home attempt to navigate the contested space between what ‘was’ and what now ‘is’ in terms of the sojourners’ changed values, attitudes, behaviours and skills. Some sojourners cannot or will not relearn the values, norms and behaviours of their home culture and choose, rather, to return permanently to the host culture (see, for example, Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Steyn & Grant, 2007).

One explanation that has been offered in support of the social learning model, as it applies to re-entry, relates to the notion of ‘home’. Schuetz (1945) first highlighted the significance of the concept of ‘home’ in his discussion of returning war veterans. ‘Home’ is, according to Schuetz (1945), not unequivocally understood; it is understood differently by the person who has never left it, by the person who dwells far from it, and by the person who returns to it.

'Home' is an intimate concept, one that involves routines, traditions, habits and patterns. According to Schuetz (1945), this level of intimacy is no longer accessible to the returnee. Any belief that the returnee may be able to re-establish pre-existing relationships with the home culture is likely to be met with disappointment, primarily because both the returnee and people at home have changed: "...from the point of view of the man left behind, as well as of the absent one,...separation interrupts the community of space and time which the other has experienced as a unique individuality" (p. 369). Schuetz (1945) clearly was foreshadowing the focus on change that emerged much later in the re-entry literature.

Storti (2001), six decades on, echoes Schuetz (1945) in his discussion of 'home', highlighting that 'home' is much more than place of birth, mother-tongue and homeland. Rather, it is a place of familiar routine, a place that consists of familiar people and predictable patterns of interaction, and where one feels grounded. For the returnee, the host culture now occupies this place of familiarity, not the home culture. The home culture is no longer 'home' in this sense. According to Storti (2001), "...this very realisation, that home is not really home, is at the core of the experience of re-entry" (p. 4). "To re-enter, it turns out, is to be temporarily homeless" (Storti, 2001, p. 19). This notion of 'home', posited by both Schuetz (1945) and Storti (2001), clearly locates the phenomenon of re-entry within a social learning model – the temporary loss of a set of social skills and patterns of behaviour, and the subsequent need to (re)learn them.

Critical variables

Since Martin (1984) first presaged the social learning model as appropriate for the study of re-entry, it has been consistently referenced in the re-entry literature (Cox, 2004; Martin & Harrell, 1996; Searle & Ward, 1990; Ward, 2004). In particular, variables have been the focus of much investigation (Adler, 1981; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Brabant et al., 1990; Cox, 2004; Gama & Pedersen, 1977; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Hammer et al., 1998; Lank, 1985; Martin & Harrell, 1996; Rohrllich & Martin, 1991; Uehara, 1986; Vidal et al., 2007). This variables approach involves, first, the identification of critical variables, then, second, a measure of the statistical relationship between these variables. Variables that have been explored in the re-entry literature include: cultural distance, previous experience overseas, length of residence in the host culture, level of adjustment in the host culture, type and quality of relationship with host nationals, communication styles and patterns, and training. This mirrors the focus of the general cultural adjustment literature and provides further support for the notion that re-entry is one form of cultural adjustment. Communication and training have received the most

attention in the re-entry literature and are explored considerably beyond their significance as variables. For this reason, communication and training will be treated separately from other variables in this section of the literature review.

Cultural distance

Cultural distance, as a concept, was introduced by Babiker, Cox and Miller (1980) in an attempt to account for the psychological distress experienced by international students studying in Edinburgh (Ward et al., 2001). They found that the greater the degree of difference (or 'distance') between cultures, the greater the degree of distress experienced by the students. Findings from this study have been supported by empirical investigations by both Torbiorn (1982) and Furnham & Bochner (1982). Clearly, research indicates that social interaction between people from diverse cultures is difficult, a notion reinforced by psychological theories such as the similarity-attraction hypothesis (Byrne, 1969). The corollary for re-entry then, seems predictable – the greater the cultural distance between the host culture and the home culture, the more difficult re-entry is likely to be. Yet, results of empirical investigations have been mixed.

A number of re-entry studies have explored the impact of cultural distance on sojourner adjustment to their home culture. While Cannon (2000), Christofi and Thompson (2007), Gama and Pedersen (1977), Gregersen and Stroh (1997) and Thompson and Christofi (2006) all found evidence in support of the notion that the greater the cultural distance the more difficult the process of re-entry, Adler (1981), Black and Gregersen (1991) and Lank (1985) did not. Gama and Pedersen (1977), for example, discovered that the majority of re-entry difficulties experienced by Brazilian postgraduates returning to a university position, were related to the impact cultural distance had on their professional lives. Lack of intellectual stimulation, lack of resources, red tape and lack of time to complete research were all cited as evidence of the differences between the host culture and the home culture and the concomitant difficulties of re-entry adjustment.

Yet, in Lank's (1985) interview study of 40 college student returnees, the countries chosen for overseas exchange appeared to make very little difference to the students' re-entry experiences. Lank (1985) claims that the readjustments required were mostly "little things" and only took a short while (p. 31). The students did, however, differentiate between adjustment to the USA and their small rural township in Vermont. While they perceived few difficulties in re-entry to USA culture, they experienced their hometown as "boring and restricted", particularly when compared to places such as London and Paris (p. 33). Similarly, Adler (1981) found no patterns between cultural distance and re-entry experiences, either

among countries or types of assignments, across a wide range of cultures. She emphasises, however, that it should not therefore be assumed that re-entry will be easy or trivial for those people returning from similar cultures. Clearly, cultural distance does have the capacity to impact on sojourners' re-entry experiences, but that impact cannot be generalised. Further investigation into this variable is needed before such generalisations can be drawn.

Previous overseas experience

It has been claimed that previous overseas experience correlates with greater ease of adjustment during re-entry (Storti, 2001). Yet, again, results of empirical research are mixed. In some instances, previous overseas experience has been shown to be positively correlated with ease of transition during re-entry. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) and Black et al. (1992), for example, found support for this claim. Yet, these findings are not consistent. Lank (1985) and Hammer et al., (1998) could find no empirical support for the claim that previous overseas experience helped ensure ease of transition during re-entry. While no clear correlation was found in Lank's (1985) study, some students admitted that they coped better with re-entry because they knew what to expect.

Length of time overseas

Similarly, length of time overseas has been forwarded as a significant predictor of re-entry adjustment (Brislin & Van Buren, 1974; Storti, 2001; Sussman, 1986). In accordance with the social learning model it is assumed that the longer the stay overseas, the more likely successful adjustment to the host culture and, consequently, the easier readjustment during re-entry as sojourners are experienced in learning social skills. This assumption has not received consistent support in the re-entry literature.

In terms of empirical studies, Black and Gregersen (1991), Gregersen and Stroh (1997) and Tung (1988) all explore the specific experience of business personnel returning to their home culture. While the relationship between length of time overseas and adjustment to *life in general* is considered (Black & Gregersen, 1991), these studies predominantly focus on the impact of length of time overseas on adjustment to the *workplace*. Black et al. (1992) suggest that the longer the employee has been overseas, the more change is likely to have occurred in the workplace and the more inaccurate the employees' expectations upon re-entry. Tung's (1988) findings are consonant with this assertion. She purports that organisational changes and technological advancements might not only be unexpected, but more significantly, make the employee's previous position in the company peripheral or redundant, or render the employee's current skills and knowledge obsolete. Thus, being absent from the workplace for a considerable period of time can make the task of professional re-integration a difficult one.

Long-term overseas experience correlates strongly with re-entry problems for children, in particular. Children returning to tight knit, homogeneous societies – such as Japan – face specific difficulties. Behaving and interacting differently to the norm is problematic and highlights, starkly, the internal and external pressure to relearn cultural norms and behaviours. Japanese students who have lived overseas long-term – known as *kikokushijo* (literally translated as “repatriated children” [Isogai et al., 1999, p. 494]) – are identifiable as returnees because of both their changed *non-verbal behaviour* and *verbal* behaviour (Kidder, 1992). Such behaviour changes are problematic for both returnees and the home culture because they represent a tension between *low-context* and *high-context* societies⁷, and between individualist and collectivist mentalities.

Two studies, however, have indicated that length of time overseas is not positively correlated with re-entry difficulties (Hammer et al., 1998; Uehara, 1986). In Uehara’s (1986) study, USA exchange students had spent between six months and four years overseas, negating any suggestion that the negative correlation might have been related to brief sojourns, characteristic of exchange students. The negative correlation in Hammer et al.’s (1998) survey study of 44 USA corporate managers and 33 of their spouses, led the authors to suggest that *re-entry* variables (for example, strength of relationships in home culture) are far more significant determinants of adjustment than *background* or *host country* variables.

Overseas adjustment

It has also been purported that those sojourners who adapt best overseas find re-entry more difficult (Brislin & Van Buren, 1974; Sussman, 1986; Weaver, 1994). One explanation for re-entry difficulty for those who adapt well overseas is reflected by the social learning model discussed earlier in this chapter. That is, in order to adapt well in the host culture, sojourners must learn new behaviours and skills and thus, have most likely modified or changed dominant home culture behaviours and skills. Re-entry means they are expected, once again, to modify or change behaviours and skills to fit back into the home culture. Yet, the findings from empirical research are not conclusive.

A number of studies have specifically sought to test the relationship between adjustment overseas and re-entry adjustment. Bochner (cited in Brislin & Van Buren, 1974), Napier and

⁷ *Low-context* societies are primarily Western. Cues for appropriate behaviour are gained through explicit verbal messages, behaviour is predictable, clear ‘rules’ are articulated and little interpretation is left to contextual clues. *High-context* societies, on the other hand, are primarily non-Western. There is heavy reliance on contextual clues – not explicit verbal messages – for regulating and understanding behaviour (Hall & Hall, 1974).

Peterson (1991) and Hammer et al. (1998), all found support for the claim that better adjustment overseas correlates with more difficult re-entry adjustment. Yet, Brabant et al. (1990), Furukawa (1997), Sussman (2002) and Uehara (1986) found no evidence of better adjustment overseas making re-entry more difficult. Furukawa (1997), for example, claims that adjustment is linked to personality, therefore maladjustment overseas is more likely to result in maladjustment at home.

Relationship with host nationals

Adjustment overseas has also been linked to the type and quality of relationship between the sojourner and the host culture nationals. This, in turn, has been linked to the re-entry experience. In one study, those students who experienced quality relationships with host nationals – for example, went on outings and evening walks with the host family – experienced more re-entry difficulties than those students who did not have the same level of relationship (Rohrlich & Martin, 1991). Returning students in Lank's (1985) study had also developed strong relationships with host nationals while overseas and, indeed, maintained communication with them once home. The majority of these students found re-entry difficult, especially women. Rohrlich and Martin (1991) suggest that this finding may be related to the host relationships being genuinely missed by returnees.

These equivocal findings in regard to critical variables reinforce the multi-faceted nature of the re-entry phenomenon. So many variables intersect in re-entry, thus rendering somewhat fraught, the capacity to isolate and separate aspects of the experience in order to establish clear causal relationships. This is further evidence of the importance of adopting a more holistic approach to re-entry. It also underscores the very individualised, personalised nature of the re-entry phenomenon; it is difficult to generalise findings conclusively. Yet such inconsistent findings are also illustrative of other pertinent issues. First are the limitations of predictive research, with some variables being measured objectively and some attitudinally (Martin, 1984). Second is the relative nascent nature of re-entry as a researched phenomenon. These variables require more consistent investigations before any generalisations can be drawn. It is precisely these issues that led Martin and Harrell (1996) to call for greater balance in re-entry research by employing more qualitative, in-depth approaches. A qualitative, in-depth approach has been adopted in this study in an attempt to redress this imbalance in the literature.

Training

That training has received consistent and thorough examination in the cultural adjustment literature is not surprising. The social learning model premise that skills and behaviours can

be learned has clearly been applied not only to intercultural training – as preparation for adjustment to a new culture – but also to the re-entry phenomenon. A plethora of intercultural training books and articles abound, some of which have re-entry as a specific focus, the first appearing in 1974 (Arthur, 2003; Bochner, 1986; Brislin et al., 1986; Brislin & Van Buren, 1974; Freedman, 1980; Furnham, 1997; Landis & Bhagat, 1996; Landis, Bennett & Bennett, 2004; Lerstrom, 1995; Martin & Harrell, 1996; Martin & Harrell, 2004; O’Sullivan, 1994; Sussman, 1986; Westwood et al., 1986). The focus of this training has developed considerably since its original concentration on language learning (Pusch, 2004). It has been claimed that the value of such training – appropriately designed and delivered – in assisting with positive outcomes during cross-cultural adjustment has been empirically proven (La Brack, 2003).

The concept of training, as it applies to cultural adjustment, has, as an undergirding assumption, the notion that preparation can impact on outcomes. This notion of preparation reducing stressful outcomes was first proposed by Janis (1958) and later empirically supported by Egbert, Battit, Welch and Bartlett (1964) in their work with surgical patients. In the cultural adjustment literature, training is perceived as a way of preparing sojourners for what they might expect when entering a new culture and, in doing so, ameliorating the affective, behavioural and cognitive difficulties associated with that adjustment. Furnham and Bochner (1986), for example, propose a Social Skills Training model that is characteristic of both earlier and later cultural adjustment training models. Theirs is a practical model including, but not confined to: cultural sensitisation (understanding the cultural basis of own and others’ behaviour); isomorphic attributions (Triandis, 1975; explaining behaviour – using vignettes called cultural assimilators – from the point of view of the other culture); and intercultural social skills training (identifying, discussing, role-playing and receiving feedback about particular social situations). Models such as this, based on Janis’s (1958) conception of preparation for stressful events, have been modified for use in re-entry.

A review of the re-entry training literature suggests that it can be categorised into three types: first, *descriptive* accounts of training programs or workshops; second, *theoretical* models with a general focus on suggested content and approaches; and third, *advice* particularly targeted at business personnel and students, further reinforcing the predominance of these two groups in the re-entry literature. Each of these categories will now be considered in more detail.

Descriptive accounts are typically of programs or workshops explicitly based on the work of Janis (1958). They characteristically involve participants identifying, visualising, role-playing, discussing and problem-solving anticipated re-entry difficulties, often through the use of

Flanagan's (1954) original concept of *critical incidents* or first-hand accounts (Arthur, 2003; Brislin & Van Buren, 1974; La Brack, 1993; Lerstrom, 1995; Mendelson et al., 2006; Westwood et al., 1986). Evaluative feedback from participants involved in these programs is positive, claiming their re-entry transition was facilitated as a result of participation. Howell (2002), in another descriptive piece, outlines a re-entry transition strategy which involves returnees pairing with enrolled international students in their home university. This is an example of returnees performing the role of mediating persons – links between two cultures (Bochner, 1986; Wilson, 1985, 1993c). Indeed, Bochner (1986) asserts that producing mediating persons is a “core construct” of the social learning model (p. 350). Implicit in these described programs is the critical role of expectations in either facilitating or hindering the re-entry adjustment.

The concept of re-entry being one part of the cultural adjustment cycle is exemplified in the *theoretical* literature pertaining to re-entry training. Black et al. (1992), La Brack (1993), Hanratty (2001) and Martin and Harrell (1996, 2004) all propose models which integrate pre-departure training, the overseas experience and re-entry training. Furthermore, they all include the affective, behaviour and cognitive aspects of adjustment. In particular, Martin and Harrell (2004) differentiate between a re-entry training model for student sojourners and professional sojourners, reflecting the two groups' varying re-entry concerns and thus allowing trainers to focus on the intricacies related to context (for example, networking with the home corporation [professional sojourners] or transferring credits to the home educational institution [student sojourners]). Such an integrated approach to training, according to La Brack (1993), prevents the “shoebox effect”, where the overseas sojourn is compartmentalised in people's minds and only occasionally taken out and examined (p. 250).

The *business* literature has consistently identified the need for, and the structure and outcomes of, re-entry training. Significant numbers of personnel leave corporations after an overseas assignment or are ineffectual in their re-entry positions (Bossard & Peterson, 2005). Re-entry training presents itself as a potential solution to this situation. Yet, to be effective, such training must recognise the social-psychological basis of re-entry adjustment. Subjects in Newton et al.'s (2007) study, for example, purported that their re-entry training focussed on issues such as taxation and financial assistance rather than counselling for adjustment issues such as change of status or lifestyle.

Literature pertaining particularly to re-entry training for *students* highlights the integral role that the hosting educational institutions should play in such preparation programs (Arthur, 2003; Butcher, 2002; Westwood et al., 1986; Sussman, 1986). This is further reinforcement

of the notion discussed earlier in this chapter of re-entry being part of a cycle of adjustment; training, or preparation, is not seen as something exclusively the responsibility of the home culture institution. Preparation should, according to the advice offered for students and host institutions, begin before leaving the host culture. More specific advice includes: maximising opportunities for communication with the home culture, including specifically those people who have already experienced re-entry, and raising awareness of the change students have likely undergone (Butcher, 2002; Sussman, 1986; Westwood et al., 1986). Support or debriefing programs, once home, are also forwarded as instrumental in helping students readjust to their home culture (Mendelson et al., 2006). Although Mendelson et al. (2006) claim that programs to support returning students have increased over the last 20 years, Hanratty (2001) reports that of the 35 USA institutions she surveyed, only 17 offered re-entry training. This is compared with 33 who offered pre-departure training. Re-entry training is clearly not universally valued.

The preceding discussion on the re-entry training literature highlights a number of pertinent points, all of which are germane not only to training, but to the re-entry phenomenon *per se*. First, there appears to be an assumption in the literature that training is something that sojourners will, or should, inherently value. Yet, as both Sussman (1986) and Arthur (2003) warn, training delivered from a Western perspective may be incongruent with other cultural ideologies. Second, and clearly related to the first point, there is also an assumption in the literature that sojourners are re-entering their home culture voluntarily and want to positively plan for their re-adjustment. Yet, some sojourners avoid returning to their home culture and clearly are unlikely to either actively engage in, or benefit from, re-entry training (Butcher, 2002). Third, there appears to be a consistent message in the re-entry training literature that such preparation is “inexpensive insurance” (Westwood et al., 1986, p. 230), yet still, many sojourners re-enter their home culture without appropriate training. One possible reason forwarded for this is expense (Black & Gregersen, 1991), particularly in regard to the complexity of appropriate re-entry training for business personnel. Yet, a more likely explanation is one that dominates the re-entry literature – the unexpectedness of re-entry adjustment difficulties. Many of the students surveyed in Hanratty’s (2001) study, for example, claimed they couldn’t see the value of re-entry training as they “already know home” (p. 32). Notwithstanding this, the capacity of re-entry training to impact on adjustment can be profound, as illustrated by Seaman (1996): *I attended a “transition seminar” ...on Third Culture Kids and the predictable patterns that often result from growing up in a country other than the one your parents call home. It was a cathartic moment in my life – as memorable as my religious conversion at age fifteen* (p. 54).

Communication

Communication, like training, can play a key role in sojourners' adjustment. It, too, has received considerable attention in the cultural adjustment literature. Kim's (1988) work, in particular, has exerted significant influence in the literature in terms of the role of communication in either facilitating or hindering cultural adjustment. Kim (1988) forwards a "stress-growth-adaptation" cycle which essentially reflects the sojourners' transition through initial culture shock to understanding and acceptance of the host culture (p. 45). Adaptation occurs "in and through communication", according to Kim (2001, p. 36). Thus, sojourners are perceived as learning to adjust to the host culture primarily through their interaction and communication with host nationals. Smith (2002a) extends this notion to re-entry by suggesting that this cycle is repeated upon return to the home culture. She claims that effective communication with family and friends during re-entry impacts positively on re-entry adjustment. Furthermore, Smith (2002b) suggests that Adler's (1981) four coping strategies (discussed earlier in the 'Affective' section of this chapter) – proactive, rebellious, alienated and resocialised – can be seen as *communication* strategies, the implication being that the choice of strategy will reflect returnees' communication competence and hence, adjustment process and outcome. Martin and Harrell (2004) integrate these understandings in their comprehensive Systems Theory of Intercultural Re-entry. They see communication as the vehicle through which "re-adaptation outcomes" (affective, behaviour and cognitive) are achieved (p. 315). Communication, then, is considered central by some researchers to both cultural adjustment generally, and re-entry, specifically.

The theme of communication – as reported in the re-entry literature – can be categorised into two distinct domains. The first is more logistical and deals with the pragmatics and outcomes of maintaining open channels of communication during and after the sojourn. The second is more relational and deals with the re-establishment and maintenance of relationships in the home culture.

Numerous studies over three decades have highlighted the benefits (in terms of re-entry adjustment) of maintaining open channels of communication between the sojourner and the home culture both whilst overseas and during re-entry (Adler, 1981; Briody & Baba, 1991; Brabant et al., 1990; Butcher, 2002; Clague & Krupp, 1978; Cox, 2004; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Lank, 1985; Napier & Peterson, 1991; Raschio, 1987; Tung, 1988). Such communication can take the form of visits home during the sojourn (see, for example, Brabant et al., 1990), internet or other written or oral communication (see, for example, Cox, 2004) or the allocation of a mentor (see, for example, Tung, 1988). If kept up-to-date about changes and events in the home culture, there should be fewer surprises for sojourners upon

re-entry and also fewer surprises for people at home who have been able to observe burgeoning changes in the sojourner (Martin & Harrell, 2004). Empirical evidence in the business literature (Adler, 1981; Briody & Baba, 1991; Butcher, 2002; Tung, 1988), the student literature (Brabant et al., 1990; Lank, 1985) and missionary literature (Cox, 2004) suggest that indeed, this is the case.

When considered in light of Argyle's (1969) conception of social interaction being a mutually skilled performance, the difficulties often encountered in regard to communication in relationships during re-entry seem understandable. Because of the changes that characteristically occur in sojourners – particularly in terms of values, knowledge and skills – coupled with changes in the home culture, the capacity to 'relate' to each other is typically compromised. Relationships are often – albeit temporarily in some cases – no longer mutually skilled performances. As an example, Chur-Hansen (2004) highlights the difficulties experienced by Australian-trained Malaysian medical interns, well versed in "patient-centred egalitarian medical communication skills", returning to their home culture to practice (p. 347). Yet this examples represent far more than simply a language barrier; it represents the difficulties encountered in transferring knowledge and skills between 'developed'/'developing', low-context/high-context and individualistic/collectivist countries and, arguably, the consequent inequities inherent in such attempts.

In terms of the maintenance of relationships, family, friends and partners are the relational groups most consistently investigated in the re-entry literature, particularly in regard to student sojourners. Martin's (1986) seminal and oft-cited paper reporting her investigation of relationships between returning high school American Field Scholars and their parents, siblings and friends, is the only re-entry study – to date – that focuses solely on the maintenance of relationships during re-entry. Other studies include relationships as one part of their investigations.

While some of the literature highlights difficulties with parental relationships during re-entry (Butcher, 2002; Raschio, 1987; Storti, 2001), it appears that, after the initial period of re-adjustment of both parties to changes, the majority of returnees report positive or enhanced relationships with parents (Lank, 1985; Martin, 1986; Raschio, 1987; Wilson, 1993c). While Martin (1986) purports that "facilitative" communication (p. 19) plays a key role in such improved relationships, she, along with Lank (1985) and Raschio (1987), suggests that this may also be related to parents' new level of respect for the returnees' recently-acquired independence. Indeed, some of the students in Raschio's (1987) study claimed that it was precisely their parents' level of respect for their newly-acquired independence that allowed

them to freely move out of home after returning. Perhaps, as Freedman (1980) suggests, there had been some “re-negotiation” of the relationship (p. 24).

According to Freedman (1980) if relationships are to be meaningful and enduring after an overseas sojourn, they must be based on a new set of mutually agreed upon expectations. There must be “an explicit re-negotiation of what used to be an implicit contract between people” (Freedman, 1980, p. 24). This notion has been reinforced by Weaver (1994). Yet, for many of the returning Asian graduate students in Butcher’s (2002) study, there appeared to be no re-negotiation. Many moved out of home because of family tension. Much of this tension was related to competing values and expectations, a direct result of competing cultural ideologies.

Although receiving less attention than parental relationships in the literature, sibling relationships are also considered. Storti (2001) suggests that siblings may feel threatened by the return of their brother or sister from overseas, having been, during their absence, the centre of their parents’ attention and having had unlimited access to previously shared resources. Martin (1986), though, found that relationships with siblings, on the whole, as with parents, improved. Familial relationships emerges as a key theme in this study.

Unlike the improvement in parental relationships experienced by many of the returnees in the re-entry literature, most studies found that relationships with friends were more complex and proved harder to maintain (Brabant et al., 1990; Cox, 2004; Lank, 1985; Martin, 1986; Raschio, 1987; Tannenbaum, 2007; Wilson, 1993c). A number of explanations have been forwarded for this finding. Martin (1986) suggests that, in regard to adolescent friendships in particular, relationships during late adolescence are more susceptible to change as a result of the fluid identity patterns that characteristically emerge during that period of time in young people’s lives. Furthermore, while parents characteristically expect and manage changes as a normal part of child-rearing, friends seem less tolerant of change. Others (Brislin & Van Buren 1974; Howell, 2002; Lank, 1985; Storti, 2001; Wilson, 1993c) suggest it is more about friends’ inability to relate to, and perhaps feel jealous of, or threatened by, returnees’ overseas experiences. Women seem particularly vulnerable to exclusion from friendship groups upon re-entry (Brabant et al., 1990; Lank, 1985). Byrne’s (1969) similarity-attraction hypothesis, mentioned earlier in this chapter, contributes some understanding of friends’ valuing of similarity rather than difference. The ultimate outcome of this situation is that returnees, in general, tend to alter their friendship groups, consciously seeking out those who have also travelled overseas (Butcher, 2002; Lank, 1985; Wilson, 1993c). These friends tend to validate the returnees’ experience, especially by asking questions about their sojourn (Martin, 1986). Validation of the overseas experience is important for sojourners (Storti, 2001). Some

returnees regarded their pre-sojourn friendships as superficial after having experienced a different level of interaction with others while overseas (Lank, 1985; Wilson, 1993c). In an interesting reversal of this perception, subjects in Tannenbaum's (2007) study found their reunion with old friends in Israel difficult, not because the returning migrants felt that they themselves had grown and moved on, but rather they felt "left behind", their friends having "accomplished so much and gone so far" in their absence from the country (p. 163).

The most fraught of all relationships interrogated in the re-entry literature are romantic partnerships (Howell, 2002; Martin, 1986). Although minimally investigated, it appears that, like some friends and unlike most parents, partners can feel threatened by recent changes and new-found independence in the returnees (Howell, 2002; Martin, 1986). Howell (2002) suggests that relationships are further threatened as partners attempt to re-enter and engage in the relationship as it existed prior to the overseas experience. As with family relationships, romantic relationships emerges as a key theme in this study.

Although receiving less attention than family and friends, relationships with academic institutions have also been the focus of some of the re-entry literature. These relationships tend to be reported in the literature as being experienced more negatively than positively by the returnee. The reasons for this are difficulties in negotiating credit transfer for overseas study (Storti, 2001) and lack of interest in, respect for, and utilisation of the returnees' new knowledge and skills (Howell, 2002; Wilson, 1985, 1993a, 1993b). Some students reported difficulties in motivation as a result of their overseas experiences; some courses seemed superficial to students after the broadening of their knowledge base and development of independent study skills overseas (Howell, 2002; Lank, 1985). For some, the transition from 'cross-cultural traveller' back to 'student' was especially difficult (Lank, 1985). Those students who reported positive experiences identified the facilitative role of supportive staff members who had previous cross-cultural experience (Wilson, 1985). Communication in relationships (intimate and other) during re-entry is, then, potentially fraught and requires careful re-negotiation on the part of both the returnee and those in the home culture. This is intimately related to the notion of identity, a concept explored more fully in the next section of this chapter.

Summary

The behaviour dimension of cultural adjustment, and consequently, re-entry adjustment, developed in response to the more medical, problem-based affective dimension of cultural adjustment. Conceptualised as social learning, the behaviour dimension views cultural adjustment as a set of learnable skills. Sojourners return home having learned a new set of

skills and behaviours that enabled them to function effectively in the host culture. On re-entry, they must relearn the social norms and behaviours of their home culture in order to regain functional fitness. Communication with family, friends and colleagues can be instrumental in either facilitating or hindering this process of regaining functional fitness. Training is advocated in the literature as an important strategy for ameliorating re-entry difficulties. Sojourners' cognitive strategies intersect with these behaviour strategies to impact on the re-entry experience.

Cognitive dimension

Whereas the *affective* domain of cultural adjustment focuses on psychological health and well-being – explored through a stress and coping theoretical framework – and the *behaviour* domain focuses on skills and functional fitness – explored through a social learning framework – the *cognitive* domain has as its focus, sojourners' thoughts, perceptions, values, attitudes and beliefs and is explored principally through a social cognition framework. Social cognition refers to the way that people think about themselves and others (Cox, 2004). It is, then, both inward and outward-looking.

Just like the affective domain (and unlike the behaviour domain), the cognitive domain focuses on the *internal* processes of sojourners. Yet, once again, it is important to highlight the interconnectedness of these three domains. While, for example, the cognitive domain is interested in the internal processes of the sojourner, those internal processes have direct implications for (external) behaviour. Of the three conceptual domains through which cultural adjustment is explored, the cognitive has been the most recently interrogated in the literature. Although increasing, it is, to date, also the least investigated, despite it being first aired in Gullahorn's and Gullahorn's seminal work in 1963. Three of the principal areas explored in the re-entry literature within the cognitive domain are values, expectations and identity. Each of these will be explored in detail in this chapter.

Cognitive dissonance

One of the key theories that informs the cognitive dimension of cultural adjustment is cognitive dissonance. In the re-entry literature, cognitive dissonance – as an outcome of re-entry – is directly referred to by a number of authors (Arthur, 2003; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Lerstrom, 1995; Meintel, 1973; Scheiber, 2000; Walling et al., 2006). First proposed by Festinger (1957/1962), the theory of cognitive dissonance refers to the difficulties encountered, and common approaches taken, when people experience incompatibility – or dissonance – between thoughts or behaviours. The hypothesis is that people will attempt to

reduce any dissonance experienced as a result of the competing cognitions by either altering existing beliefs or behaviours, or adopting new ones. Alternatively, people will avoid those situations that cause the dissonance (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Meintel, 1973). When people engage in behaviour that is incongruent with their beliefs, most will choose to change their beliefs to accommodate the behaviour (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995; Weaver, 1998). Of particular relevance to cultural adjustment is the fact that cognitive dissonance is heightened when one of the competing cognitions is about *self* (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995). The direct link with re-entry, particularly in regard to identity, is clear.

When entering a new culture or re-entering their home culture, sojourners characteristically experience cognitive dissonance as they attempt to reconcile competing cultural behaviours, beliefs and expectations. Those beliefs and behaviours that brought them success in one culture, can be the cause of both internal and external conflict in another (Freedman, 1980; Raschio, 1987; Weaver, 1994). J. Bennett (1977) claims that such cognitive inconsistency is a universal aspect of any transitional experience, where “what once was a coherent, internally consistent set of beliefs and values is suddenly overturned by exterior change” (p. 47). It is typically purported in the literature that the natural human tendency in the face of such inconsistency is to strive for internal equilibrium (Freedman, 1980; Kim, 2001; Piaget, 1978/1985).

Yet, according to Augoustinos and Walker (1995), this assumption has been challenged by some writers who claim that humans are far more tolerant of competing cognitions than the cognitive dissonance theory implies and that, indeed, the assumption that humans seek equilibrium is a “cultural construction” (p. 23). Markus and Kitayama (1991) similarly suggest that the desire for cognitive consistency is a strong motive in Western cultures, in particular. The benefit for sojourners, however, in achieving equilibrium, either in entering a new culture or re-entering their home culture, is that they are likely to be more efficient in their environment when in a state of equilibrium (Piaget, 1978/1985). In other words, efficiency equates with ease of adjustment for returnees. The pursuit of equilibrium by returnees can manifest itself in a number of ways: withdrawal from the home culture (see, for example, Steyn & Grant, 2006) or returning to the host culture (see, for example, Christofi & Thompson, 2007); balancing new cognitive constructs with old (see, for example, Thompson and Christofi, 2006); or rejection of the new cognitive constructs (see, for example Arthur, 2003).

One of the primary reasons that dissonance is felt during re-entry, as discussed earlier in this chapter, is that both the returnee and the home culture – including the people in it – have undergone change, often without either being aware of it (Howell, 2002; Martin, 1984; Freedman, 1980; Scheiber, 2000; Schuetz, 1945; Smith, 2002b; Sussman, 1986). This change, although also related to the affective and behaviour dimensions, is reported in the re-entry literature as having a particularly profound impact in relation to *values*. Indeed, Uehara (1986) claims that changes in the returnees' value systems "seem to be the most powerful predictor associated with re-entry culture shock" (pp. 433-434).

Values

Sojourners come, through experience, to understand unequivocally that values are not universal. Whilst overseas, sojourners will characteristically adopt new values and change existing values (Westwood et al., 1986), both at a conscious and unconscious level. These values can often be contradictory to those dominant in the home culture. By way of illustrating this point, Storti (2001) asks how a missionary family returning from two years in Africa can possibly make sense of the cat food aisle in the supermarket. Empirical research suggests that reconciling these conflicting values can cause distress for the returnee and family, friends and colleagues in the home culture. The students in Uehara's (1986) study, for example, reported changed value systems, particularly in regard to views about male/female relationships, individualism, clothing and achievement-oriented behaviour as being directly associated with re-entry difficulties. Values, then, can take on a transient nature for the returnee.

Numerous studies have confirmed that women experience more difficulty during re-entry than men (Brabant et al., 1990; Gama & Pederson, 1977; Lank, 1985; Sahin, 1990; Thompson & Christofi, 2006). Many of these difficulties relate particularly to altered values, but as Brabant et al. (1990) point out, it is usually significant others' responses to those changed values that cause difficulties rather than the changes themselves. Women in Brabant et al.'s (1990), Gama's and Pedersen's (1977) Thompson's and Christofi's (2006) and Steyn's and Grant's (2007) studies experienced more family problems during re-entry than men. They all resisted the restrictive gender roles placed on them by their families. Such a clash in values is likely to exacerbate cognitive dissonance.

The re-entry literature suggests that changes in values can occur at a more global level as well. The power, affluence and materialism of the USA are cited as challenging for many returnees, particularly for those who had sojourned in non-Western countries. Missionaries seem

especially vulnerable to such challenges (Austin, 1983b; Howell, 2002; Raschio, 1987; Walling et al., 2006; Westwood et al., 1986). In Walling et al.'s (2006) investigation of undergraduate Christian college missionaries' re-entry experiences, "negative reaction to the home culture" was the most extensive and frequently discussed theme (p. 158). The majority reported feeling anger and guilt upon re-entry. South African political exiles also gained a broader perspective on the way in which historical forces act on each other. The role that the demise of the Soviet Union played in changing the balance of power in South Africa became more discernible upon re-entry and contributed towards a sense of powerlessness in the historical moment (Steyn & Grant, 2006). Such experiences are testimony to the potential negative impact of changed or conflicting values on re-entry.

Yet, not all value changes necessarily result in negative outcomes during re-entry. Cannon's (2000) study of Indonesian graduates returning to work in Indonesia, reveals that changed perceptions of the value of time was cause for frustration and consternation in their professional lives, but was not particularly destabilising. Varying perceptions of time also highlighted the value inherent in a slower-paced life for returning USA lecturers in Gullahorn's and Gullahorn's study (1963). They expressed nostalgia for the more relaxed pace of life overseas and missed the time available for lengthy collegial discussions and reflection. As a consequence they attempted to alter the way they used their time at work once home in the USA. For many of the American student missionaries in Walling et al.'s (2006) study, contradiction in values reinforced their commitment to their missionary work. Contested values, then, have the capacity to both hinder and facilitate re-entry adjustment.

Expectations

Numerous researchers have recorded the role that sojourner expectations play in adjustment to a foreign culture (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Searle & Ward, 1990; Weaver, 1993). Generally, high expectations that aren't fulfilled correlate positively with poor adjustment and, in the case of migrants, with increased mental illness (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). As with most of the cultural adjustment literature, these findings are directly transferable to re-entry.

Expectations is a theme that has dominated the re-entry literature since the seminal work of Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963). Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) purport that, as a result of their "re-socialisation experience" overseas, sojourners acquire expectation patterns congruent with the host culture and, as a consequence, feel "out of phase" with their home culture upon re-entry (p. 39). Sojourners expect to experience difficulties when they enter a

new culture (Furnham & Bochner, 1986). The re-entry literature suggests that they do not expect to experience difficulties when re-entering their own culture (Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Cox, 2004; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Martin, 1984; Martin & Harrell, 2004; Osland, 1995; Rogers & Ward, 1993; Storti, 2001; Thompson & Christofi, 2006; Tung, 1988; Weaver, 1994; Westwood et al., 1986). Sojourners are, on the whole, “ill-prepared for the need to interpret a new set of unwritten social norms” (Westwood et al., 1986, p. 222). This infers that re-entry adjustment will be more affectively, behaviourally and cognitively challenging if difficulties are unanticipated – a notion discussed earlier in this chapter in regard to preparation for stressful events (Janis, 1958).

Also, as discussed earlier in this chapter, not only are many sojourners not expecting re-entry difficulties, they are, in the main, not expecting places or people at home to have changed. Sojourners aren't anticipating the fact that “home cultures continue to evolve” (Osland, 1995, p. 172). Yet, seemingly paradoxically, it is the fact that things at home seem *not* to have changed that can also cause great frustration for the returnee (Howell, 2002; Thompson & Christofi, 2006). Home can seem boring, predictable and parochial for some. Furthermore, people at home are not expecting to welcome home a changed sojourner. This intricate mix of expectations contributes to an understanding of the significant impact they have on re-entry adjustment.

As highlighted in Chapter One, most sojourners do not expect re-entry difficulties because they are returning to a place and to people known to them – *they're going home*. This is a perception that has been recorded consistently in the re-entry literature (Black, 1992; Brislin & Van Buren, 1974; Clague & Krupp, 1978; Hanratty, 2001; Howell, 2002; Martin, 1984; Schuetz, 1945; Storti, 2001; Westwood et al., 1986). Yet, as previously discussed, the notion of ‘home’ can be problematic for sojourners (Schuetz, 1945; Storti, 2001). If ‘home’ is a place of familiar people and routines, then the host culture often replaces – albeit temporarily in most cases – the home culture as ‘home’ for sojourners. Changed relationships, careers, health or domicile can all add to the difficulty sojourners experience in reconnecting with the home culture (Storti, 2001). However, it is not only home that has changed; it is also the sojourners' *perception* of home that has changed.

It is well documented in the cultural adjustment literature that overseas sojourns characteristically result in growth, self-discovery and changed world views (Adler, 1975; J. Bennett, 1977; Butcher, 2002; Howell, 2002; Kim, 2001; Osland, 1995; Scheiber, 2000; Smith, 2002b; Steyn & Grant, 2006; Uehara, 1986; Weaver, 1994; Wilson, 1993b). According to Furnham (1993), this results in the need to develop a new set of cognitive

constructs. In developing new cognitive constructs people learn to see themselves as cultural beings and in doing so become more observers than participants in their own culture as well as the new culture (Ballard, 1981; Weaver, 1994). In the words of Weaver (1998), "...the irony is that the way we often find our culture is by leaving it" (p. 73). This is a notion also espoused by a number of other authors (Adler, 1975; Ballard, 1981; Hall, 1976). Thus, during the overseas sojourn for some, and during re-entry for others, most individuals gain greater insight into the role that culture plays in shaping their own personalities, behaviour and beliefs and those in their home environment. This process is not an easy one - the self essentially becomes a contested site.

Additionally, some sojourners 'romanticise' their home culture while overseas (Austin, 1983a; Brislin & Van Buren, 1974; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Holm, 1990; Osland, 1995; Steyn & Grant, 2006; Tannenbaum, 2007; Weaver, 1994; Werkman, 1980). As Holm (1990) recounts:

After a year in China, it is difficult even to remember America as a real country; it is a place created by your own imagination, where goods are available, service provided, language clear and direct, machines function with elegant efficiency, the food is clean, greaseless and served hot, the newspapers lively and truthful, and the weather an eternal southern California of the soul...Every Westerner I met in China who was there for a long time invents his own version of this imaginary America. (pp. 19-20)

Disillusionment can set in for the sojourner when such idealised expectations are unmet. Things hitherto considered quaint, or even unquestioned or unobserved, can be seen through new cultural eyes as parochial, prejudiced or materialistic (Storti, 2001). Articulation of such observations can be destabilising for family and friends as they realise they are welcoming home someone 'new' (Freedman, 1980). Constant comparisons between the host and the home culture are likely to be tolerated by family, friends and colleagues only in the short term (Osland, 1995).

An expectation that sojourners often have, and that is regularly unmet, is that people at home will be interested in hearing their stories (Austin, 1983b; Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Brislin, 1981; Mendelson et al., 2006; Osland, 1995; Raschio, 1987; Smith, 2002b; Storti, 2001). Rather, people at home are often more interested in alerting the returnee to all the issues and events missed during their absence – a phenomenon known in the re-entry literature as the

“Uncle Charlie syndrome” (Brislin, 1981; Brislin & Van Buren, 1974; Weaver, 1994). In other words, family appear more interested in explaining the details of Uncle Charlie’s broken arm or Uncle Charlie’s roses than hearing returnees’ overseas stories. As one returnee in Osland’s (1995) study described, “they don’t want to hear about it, though you think you’ve gone through something unique. They’ll listen for thirty seconds and tell you what the [pro football team] did in your absence. The feeling is that you can’t hold their interest long enough to talk about it” (p. 178). Yet, it is not necessarily a case of family and friends being disinterested; most have no way of relating to the experiences of the sojourner (Freedman, 1980; Mendelson et al., 2006; Raschio, 1987; Storti, 2001). Furthermore, much of an overseas experience is non-verbal and thus, extremely difficult to translate into words for others (Werkman, 1980). Shared meanings then, become more intangible. Those identified as being most interested in the returnees’ stories are people who have previously travelled or who express an interest in travelling (Martin, 1986; Raschio, 1987). Clearly, families’ and friends’ expectations play an equally significant role as sojourners’ expectations in their re-entry adjustment.

Two key social psychological theories inform this discussion of expectations: the *expectancy-value model* (Furnham & Bochner, 1986) and the *expectancy-violations model* (Burgoon & Walther, 1990). The *expectancy-value model* has as its undergirding premise, the notion that a person’s behaviour is intimately related to the expectations they hold and the consequences they perceive resulting from such behaviour. In relation to cultural adjustment, this translates as sojourners having expectations that are either fulfilled or unfulfilled. Fulfilled expectations generally correlate with greater ease of adjustment, unfulfilled expectations with greater difficulty (Martin & Harrell, 2004). The *expectancy-violations model* extends this concept by suggesting that not all unfulfilled expectations result in negative adjustment outcomes. Rather, it is more directly related to whether expectations are either *positively* or *negatively* violated. In other words, if expectations are *negatively* violated (i.e. the situation is worse than expected) then adjustment is negatively affected. If expectations are *positively* violated (i.e. the situation is better than expected), then adjustment is positively affected (Martin & Harrell, 2004). Both these models have been empirically tested and supported in the cultural adjustment literature.

Longitudinal studies exploring the expectations of student sojourners have confirmed that over-met expectations result in better adjustment, whereas under-met expectations result in more difficult adjustment (Martin et al., 1995; Rogers & Ward, 1993). Rogers and Ward (1993) surveyed 20 American Field Scholar high school students about their expectations in regard to social difficulty. They were surveyed prior to leaving their host country and again

after returning to New Zealand. They discovered that where expectations were negatively violated (that is, were more difficult than expected), adjustment problems occurred. This led the authors to suggest that sojourners should be “over-prepared” for social difficulties upon re-entry (p. 194).

It is apparent, then, that the relative accuracy of expectations does play a vital role in helping to determine the ease or otherwise of re-entry adjustment. Yet, Rogers and Ward (1993) raise a methodological concern. They warn of the difficulty in gauging the accuracy of sojourners’ expectations. Their expectations are often inaccurate, especially if inexperienced. Nonetheless, the formulation of expectations has been heralded as a key factor in the reduction of uncertainty – “one of the principal theoretical processes related to adjustment” (Black, 1992, p. 178). This helps to explain the consistency with which expectations, as a theme, appears in training models.

Identity

Although changed or competing values and expectations have a significant impact on sojourners’ adjustment to their home culture, perhaps the most profound impact is discernible in relation to identity change. While identity, as a phenomenon, has a long and rich history in literature *per se*, its exploration in the re-entry literature is relatively recent. The focus in the *re-entry* literature, perhaps predictably, relates particularly to *cultural identity* – that is, the degree to which one identifies with the home or the host culture. Most of the *cultural adjustment* literature, however, relates cultural identity to long-term immigrant adjustment, not short-term sojourners (Sussman, 2002; Ward et al., 2001). Cultural identity is a burgeoning area of investigation in re-entry. Much of the preceding discussion in this ‘Cognitive’ section of this chapter directly informs the following discussion of ‘Identity’ in re-entry.

While the concept of ‘self’ is integral to any discussion of identity, there is an inextricable link in the cultural adjustment literature between *self* and *other*, between the *individual* and the *collective*. Cultural identity is conceptualised as far more than personal identity; it incorporates both the independent self and the interdependent self (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). As Adler (1975) asserts, “[what] begins with the encounter of another culture...evolves into the encounter with self” (p. 18). The role of others in helping to shape identity is well established (Cooley, 1902/1964; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Tajfel, 1978; Triandis, 1989). Cooley’s (1902/1964) notion of the “looking-glass self” is germane here (p. 184).

According to Cooley (1902/1964), just as we look into a mirror to discover our appearance, we see ourselves reflected through the eyes of others. It is others' responses and reactions to us that help us determine our self-identities. Thus, for those who have lived in more than one culture, identity formation becomes particularly difficult. People's responses to behaviour will vary, depending on cultural context. Therefore, living in more than one culture essentially means developing multiple sets of behaviours that are designed to elicit the desired (affirming) responses from others (Stonequist, 1935/1961). Much of this happens at an unconscious level and can be particularly destabilising. Isogai et al. (1999) suggest that for some sojourners, experiencing this phenomenon for the first time can raise concerns about the existence of a personality disorder.

Triandis (1989) also provides some insight into the relationship between self, culture and behaviour. Triandis (1989), drawing on the work of Baumeister, maintains that there are three selves: *private* (cognitions related to self traits or behaviours); *public* (cognitions related to generalised others' perceptions of the self); and *collective* (cognitions related to significant others' [family, friends] perceptions of the self). The emergence or dominance of one or more of these selves is determined by a number of cultural dimensions. These dimensions are: individualism and collectivism (individual needs versus group needs); cultural complexity (the number of 'ingroups' to which one belongs); and tightness and looseness (the freedom to adhere to or deviate from group norms). The *private* self, therefore, is likely to be more dominant in individualist countries than the *public* or *collective* self. This suggests that the dominant characteristics of a culture can be key determinants of a person's behaviour and consequently, identity. The potential impact on sojourners' identities as they move between cultures is clear. This reinforces the discussion in the first part of this chapter that any consideration of re-entry as a phenomenon, must be made within broader conceptualisations of culture.

Triandis's concept of multiple selves – in particular, the *public* and *collective* selves – is reflected in Tajfel's (1978) notion of *social identity*. Social identity, according to Tajfel (1978) is "that part of the individual's self-concept which derives from his (or her) knowledge of his (or her) membership in a social group (or groups) together with the values and emotional significance attached to that membership" (p. 63). In other words, our self-identity is determined not only by our personal traits, but by the groups to which we belong. We tend to associate with groups that serve to enhance our self-esteem, resulting in favourable bias towards those groups to which we belong. This is the basis of Social Identity Theory, a commonly used theory in exploring identity in cultural transitions (Ward, 2004).

The explanation of culture shock as an 'identity crisis' has been consistently referenced in the cultural adjustment literature (Adler, 1975; Ballard, 1981; Weaver, 1993; Zaharna, 1989) and applied, in turn, to re-entry (Austin, 1983a; Butcher, 2002; Steyn & Grant, 2007; Sussman, 2000; Weaver, 1994). During any transition experience the question 'Who am I?' is likely to emerge (J. Bennett, 1977). Indeed, Austin (1983a) claims that "a new identity emerges from the sojourn experience" (p. 124). This is because, as Weaver (1993) suggests, an overseas experience "offers a new social milieu in which to examine one's behaviour, perceptions, values, and thought patterns" (p. 192). Previously unconscious and taken-for-granted ways of behaving and perceiving oneself are thrown into stark relief against the backdrop of an alternative culture.

Sussman (2000) describes this new awareness of one's own culture as 'cultural identity salience'; it is characteristically accompanied by self-concept disturbances. Sojourners thus typically re-evaluate themselves as cultural beings after an overseas sojourn (Ballard, 1981). Renegotiating their identity on return to their home culture is reported in the literature as being characteristically difficult and destabilising for sojourners. Much of the preceding discussion regarding changed values and expectations is testimony to this difficulty. In support of this claim, Sussman (2001) discovered that returning USA business managers who underwent the greatest identity change experienced the greatest distress. This notion of identity change being experienced as difficult is further reinforced by the consistent references in the re-entry literature to returnees feeling like 'strangers' in their own culture (Furnham, 1993; Hickson 1994; Smith, 1996; Storti, 2001; Westwood et al., 1986). Yet, those with a well established sense of self-identity are more likely to experience ease of adjustment (J. Bennett, 1977).

Two re-entry theories and models with identity as the core construct have recently been developed (Smith, 2002b; Sussman, 2000). Sussman's (2000) cultural identity model is based on the assumption that the role and significance of the 'cultural self' has been previously underestimated in the transition process. Despite the focus in Sussman's (2000) model being specifically on re-entry, the model's relationship to other generic cultural adjustment models which consider cultural identity is clearly discernible (see, for example, Berry, 1974; Adler, 1981). Sussman (2000) claims that sojourners proceed through a number of phases in relation to cultural identity. First, sojourners become aware of their cultural basis of their identity when first adjusting to a new culture. Second, discrepancies between their cultural selves and the new culture are recognised by the sojourner. It is at this point that sojourners have a range of choices of behaviour on a continuum from maintaining their own cultural selves to adopting a new cultural self. This results in sojourners experiencing one of four possible

cultural identity shifts. Sussman (2000) has labelled these identity shifts as *subtractive*, *additive*, *affirmative* and *intercultural*. Once sojourners return to their home culture, this cycle is repeated – identity salience becomes paramount and cultural identity shifts are experienced once again.

Sojourners who undergo *subtractive* identity shifts (that is, sojourners feel less comfortable with their home culture and tend to seek out other returnees) or *additive* identity shifts (that is, sojourners feel more comfortable with the host culture norms and behaviours) experience greater difficulty during re-entry as they have undergone the greatest identity shifts. Sojourners who undergo *affirmative* identity shifts (that is, the home culture identity is maintained and strengthened) or *intercultural* identity shifts (that is, sojourners draw upon multiple scripts and self-concepts), experience greater ease during re-entry as they have undergone minimal identity shifts. Sussman (2000) claims that her model is, therefore, predictive and, unlike other repatriation models, helps explain why re-entry is typically so difficult.

Shifts in cultural identity have been empirically tested. A study undertaken by Sussman (2002) to test her identity model found that, indeed, those teachers returning to the USA from a sojourn in Japan who had the weakest cultural identity (that is, experienced *subtractive* or *additive* identity shifts) experienced distress upon re-entry. According to Sussman (2000, 2001), those sojourners who dissociate most from their home culture whilst overseas, struggle the most when they return home. Walling et al. (2006) concur with these findings. In their study of short-term college missionaries returning to the USA, they found that a strong disconnection between the overseas experience and their home culture resulted in re-entry distress. Interestingly, and somewhat different to Sussman's (2002) and Walling et al.'s (2006) findings, in a study of 101 missionaries returning from two year sojourns in 44 different countries, Cox (2004) found that a balance between *home favoured* and *host favoured* cultural identities resulted in greater ease of adjustment. Moreover, Tannenbaum (2007) discovered that Sussman's (2000, 2002) notion of the salience of cultural identity increasing during cultural transition was less applicable to his sample of returning Israelis. This, he opines, is the result of an already well developed salient identity prior to his subjects' migration, itself a reflection of the collectivist nature of Israeli society. As with many other areas related to re-entry research, greater exploration is required before more definitive conclusions about changes in cultural identity and re-entry adjustment can be drawn.

With a somewhat different focus to Sussman (2000), Smith (2002b) forwards a theory that is based on the assumption that identity change and identity negotiation are the keys to understanding intercultural communication competence in re-entry. She asserts that,

“accepting that people bring multiple cultural identities to an interaction, and that communication becomes intercultural when people involved in an interaction adopt different cultural identities, helps us to see the intercultural nature of communication in re-entry” (p. 306). It can be assumed, therefore, that sojourners’ intercultural identities will appear, often unknowingly and unconsciously on the part of the sojourners, during interactions in the home culture. This is a situation that is likely to be confusing to home culture members who have not shared the returnee’s international experience and who now cannot seem to relate to, or communicate effectively with, the returnee (Smith, 2002b). Smith’s (2002b) theory is clearly reflective of the concepts inherent in Cooley’s (1902/1964), Tajfel’s (1978) and Triandis’s (1978) perspectives of identity discussed earlier.

Other re-entry literature has highlighted identity change experiences of sojourners. Changed status, for example, emerges as a key theme in relation to identity change. The move from a ‘big fish in a little pond’ to a ‘little fish in a big pond’ is how many sojourners relate their renegotiated identities during re-entry (Austin, 1983a; Osland, 1995; Storti, 2001). For business personnel, their prestigious, often powerful role overseas is rarely replicated in the home culture. Similarly, for students, the exotic visitor role enjoyed overseas is replaced, most often, with simply fitting back in with the crowd (Storti, 2001). Self-efficacy also emerges as a theme in the re-entry literature in relation to identity. It appears that where self-efficacy is enhanced during an overseas sojourn, cultural identity, and thus re-entry adjustment, are positively affected (Black et al., 1992; Milstein, 2005; Vidal et al., 2007).

One of the outcomes of identity change is that sojourners can become marginalised in their home culture. Marginality, as a concept, was first introduced by the sociologist Park (1928), and later extrapolated by Stonequist (1935/1961), to describe the experience of feeling like an outsider and not belonging in either culture – of living in the margins. Like the medical model of affective adjustment, this early view of marginality was pathologised and viewed as an entirely negative phenomenon. J. Bennett (1993), however, reconceptualises the notion of marginality as a potentially positive experience. Marginality, according to J. Bennett (1993), is a cultural lifestyle at the edges of two or more cultures. This lifestyle can be either ‘encapsulating’ or ‘constructive’. An ‘encapsulated’ marginal is “a person who is buffeted by conflicting cultural loyalties and unable to construct a unified identity” (p. 113). A ‘constructive’ marginal, on the other hand, is “a person who is able to construct context intentionally and consciously for the purpose of creating his or her own identity” (p. 113).

Schaetti (1996), a global nomad, describes her multiple experiences of re-entry as ‘encapsulated’. She felt “trapped by [her] difference” (p. 184). This was also the experience

of some of the subjects in Christofi's and Thompson's (2007) and Thompson's and Christofi's (2006) studies. They reported feeling as if they 'had a foot in each culture' – they did not belong, or feel settled in either. Experiences such as those reported by these sojourners have led Martin and Harrell (2004) to underscore the importance of re-entry training. They suggest that without re-entry training intercultural sojourns are likely to become 'encapsulated' – "tucked away in the mind of the sojourner" – and consequently unable to be utilised for personal and professional growth and development (p. 311). Marginality emerges as a critical theme in this study.

In some cultures, marginality is actively discouraged as returnees are pressured to conform to preferred cultural identities. Japanese culture represents a particularly discernible example of this. Japanese sojourners "return to a society that holds a mirror to their changed affect" (Kidder, 1992, p. 384). Returnees who are visibly different report being bullied and often attempt to hide their difference, a strategy that "may leave the person with a feeling that this is not the real self" (Kidder, 1992, p. 390). One girl described the distress she felt when met by her mother on return to Japan: "the first thing my mother did, before saying 'Welcome home,' she checked my face for make-up and my ears (not pierced) and said 'good.' And that really hurt" (Kidder, 1992, p. 386). Yet, Sasagawa et al. (2006) report on a study that claimed Japanese children assumed a unique identity as 'returnees' – they identified with neither their host or their home culture. Adult Japanese returnees, on the other hand, are often neglected in the re-entry research, yet for many there are long-lasting identity issues (Isogai et al., 2006).

Summary

A relatively recent perspective in the cultural adjustment literature, the cognitive dimension with its focus on how people think about themselves and others, complements the affective and behaviour dimensions with their focus on how people feel and behave during cultural transitions. Altered values, expectations and identities typically pose adjustment difficulties for sojourners as they renegotiate their place in their home culture. The interplay between self and other emerges as a key theme in this perspective of cultural adjustment.

Methodological issues in the re-entry literature

In the introductory section to this chapter, some of the fundamental methodological issues surrounding the re-entry literature were foreshadowed. The ensuing interrogation of this literature has confirmed its USA, white, privileged, voluntary, individual adjustment focus. Furthermore, the dominance of student and business sojourners, as subjects of this literature,

has become apparent. Although still reported anecdotally, there has been a discernible trend towards more empirical investigations of re-entry. The re-entry specific literature reviewed for this chapter, for example, reveals almost two-thirds of the studies employed survey/questionnaire or interview techniques, or a combination of these. A large number of these studies attempt to *explain* the re-entry phenomenon. This current study aims to *explore* rather than explain. A number of recent studies have, however, indicated a move towards greater exploration of the phenomenon through phenomenological approaches (Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Steyn & Grant, 2006; Thompson & Christofi, 2006; Tannenbaum, 2007).

A limited number of re-entry theories have emerged, some adaptations of other theories applied to re-entry, and some emerging directly from re-entry investigations. This paucity of theories is perhaps not surprising, given the relatively limited – albeit increasing – number of studies that focus exclusively on re-entry and the narrow lens through which the phenomenon is explored. Greater breadth and depth in terms of subjects and approaches will contribute to a more fertile ground for the formulation of theories.

Moreover, greater breadth and depth in re-entry research will help reduce the tendency to generalise from limited studies. Martin's (1986) seminal study investigating relationships with sojourners during re-entry, for example, the only re-entry empirical study with a sole focus on relationships, is consistently cited in the literature as evidence of the character of re-entry relationships. Similarly, Gama's and Pedersen's (1977) study of returning Brazilian postgraduates is consistently cited as evidence of the particular difficulties faced by women during re-entry. While it is undoubtedly true that these studies do have credible and valid findings, they are now reasonably dated. A broader research base would add further validity to these findings. Finally, by relying almost exclusively on a cross-sectional approach, the notion of re-entry as a *process* has clearly emerged as a silence in the literature. This is an issue that warrants further investigation and is, consequently, explicitly addressed in this study.

Conclusion

This literature review has situated this study by examining the three theoretical traditions through which re-entry, as one form of cultural adjustment, has been primarily investigated in the literature. These three theoretical traditions are: *affective* (how people *feel*), explored principally through a stress and coping framework; *behaviour* (how people *behave*), explored principally through a social learning framework; and more recently, *cognitive* (how people *think*), explored principally through a social cognition framework. Although segregated for

the purpose of this chapter, and often segregated in empirical investigations and the reporting of such investigations, affective, behaviour and cognitive aspects of re-entry are experienced simultaneously by sojourners. This impels an investigation of the re-entry phenomenon that honours its multi-layered, multi-faceted character, rather than fragments it. In response to this claim, this study, then, explores, in depth, six individuals' evolving, holistic experiences of re-entry and their meaning-making of those experiences. The next two chapters outline and justify the methodological approach taken in this study in order to meet this aim.

Ways of Knowing

Methodology (1)

It is becoming more and more obvious to those concerned with cross-cultural understanding that in addition to objective methods usually employed in the social sciences (data collection, statistical tables, diagrams, and so on), the voices of flesh-and-blood people crossing linguistic and cultural boundaries need also to be taken into account. (Wierzbicka, 2003, p. xvi)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to describe and justify the research design and the methodological decisions made in preparing for and undertaking this study.

My substantive literature search had already revealed significant gaps in methodological approaches to the study of the re-entry phenomenon – namely, minimal longitudinal data gathering; a dearth of open-ended exploration and in-depth interviewing that provided opportunities for people to not only tell unique stories of their lived experience, but also share their understanding of those experiences; and few holistic accounts. While much of the substantive literature resonated strongly with me, I felt frustrated, and in some instances ‘cheated’, in my reading, in not getting the full story, in wanting more and finding myself asking, “And then what?”, “But what about?” I was hungry to know not only what happened, but more significantly, what meaning these people made from their experiences. No social science research will ever, or can ever, provide a full and complete picture of the phenomenon under scrutiny, but it became increasingly clear from my reading that few re-entry studies even attempted to provide in-depth holistic accounts of experience; most were fragmented, discrete accounts and most focussed on describing, explaining or predicting, not exploring individual experiences – a situation aptly captured by Wierzbicka’s (2003) comment above.

The empirical studies that had the most profound impact on me – the only studies that I felt provided a deep insight into people’s experience and highlighted the multi-faceted aspects of the re-entry phenomenon – were Steyn’s and Grant’s (2006) phenomenological study of the re-entry experiences of South African political exiles and Tannenbaum’s (2007) narratives of

Israeli migrants returning to their homeland after an average of 11 years overseas. I took away from these studies a far deeper understanding of the impact of re-entry on people's lives, and the meaning people made of those experiences, than from any of the other studies I read. While Barthes (1977) provides us with a salutary reminder – through his use of the term “death of the author” (p. 142) – that readers will always draw their own meaning from any text, I wanted my study to provide an opportunity for in-depth insight for readers, similar to the impact the reporting of Steyn's and Grant's and Tannenbaum's studies had had on me. I couldn't control or predict how readers would respond to my writing, but I could move the focus of my writing from a narrow, prescriptive one to a broader, more holistic one. One of the influences in my methodological decision-making, then, was how best to address the deficits in the substantive literature and how to build upon those studies I had identified as particularly resonant.

Yet, my methodological approach needed to be grounded in a far more rigorous and substantive conceptualisation than one based primarily on gaps in the literature and inquiry approaches that resonated strongly with me. Clearly, it needed to contribute directly to the achievement of my research aim. As Mills (1959) reminds us, it is our research ‘problems’ that should determine our choice of methods; methods should not determine or “delimit” our problems (p. 72). Therefore, I needed an approach that would best help me achieve my aim – to explore the re-entry experiences of the participants in my study.

Furthermore, I needed to explore how my ontological and epistemological positioning was likely to inform my methodological approach. Thus, the first, and possibly most significant step in my methodological journey, was to examine and challenge my own taken-for-granted understandings and beliefs about ‘reality’ and ‘knowledge’ – ideas I had always intuitively understood as ‘right’. What emerged from this confluence of: identification of both gaps and resonant studies in the substantive literature; consideration of my research aim; and exploration of ontological and epistemological positioning, was a study grounded in, and reflective of, the constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). My study involved just six participants and employed a narrative inquiry approach, both in the gathering of the data through in-depth interviews, and the presentation of the findings. A critical outcome of this methodological decision-making was a study that was ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically congruent.

What follows in the remainder of this chapter is an extended discussion: first, the influence of key thinkers and writers from various disciplines in the human sciences – particularly over the last half century – on my ontological and epistemological positioning and the subsequent

conceptualisation, design and implementation of this study; second, the role and function of narrative inquiry as a methodological approach most appropriate for meeting this study's aim; third, the design, implementation and apposite qualities of an in-depth, interactional interviewing method of data gathering; fourth, the recruitment of subjects; and finally, the tensions surrounding ethical issues.

Ontological and epistemological positioning

That my study would be qualitative in nature – in particular, firmly grounded in the constructivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2005) – was predictable, given my background and experience. My ontological and epistemological beliefs, and methodological practices, epitomised in my teaching and my previous research, have always been congruent with a constructivist philosophy: there are multiple realities; knowledge is a social construction by individuals whose idiosyncratic experiences form the basis of the teacher's planning and the researcher's inquiry; the researcher and the researched co-construct understandings and texts; and naturalistic methodological procedures best complement this relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Hatch, 2002).

Denzin and Lincoln (2005) define qualitative research as

...consist[ing] of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible...This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them...[They] describe routine and problematic moments and meanings in individuals' lives. (pp. 3-4)

I was attempting to make visible individuals' meaning-making of their experience of the phenomenon of re-entry – typically a problematic moment in sojourners' lives. The aim of this study, motivated initially by my own personal experience, was clearly congruent with a constructivist approach. But decisions about the most apposite way to carry out that exploration required deeper consideration.

My starting point – reflective of my field dependent learning style (Witkin & Goodenough, 1981) was to investigate thoroughly the basis of my constructivist philosophy. From earlier research, I was aware of Phillip's (1997) differentiation between *psychological constructivism* (bodies of knowledge or personal identities that *individuals* construct) and

social constructivism (how *public* bodies of knowledge are constructed). In interviewing individuals about their personal experiences, my study was clearly an example of psychological constructivism – although Phillips (1997) does warn of the danger of artificially segregating the two as individual constructions cannot be solitary; all activity, he contends, is “inextricably social” (p. 20). Also, having been an educator for 26 years, I was deeply familiar with the cognitive constructivist work of Piaget (1978/1985) and the social constructivist work of Vygotsky (1934/1962). The Vygotskian notion of knowledge construction through social interaction had long been integral to my student-centred teaching approach. But I wanted to understand more fully how intellectual thought had progressed from the notion of knowledge as a mirror of reality to one of knowledge as a social construction of reality, and what subsequent implications this had for my study. What follows, then, is a brief insight into the way in which key thinkers and writers, particularly over the last half century, influenced the theoretical conceptualisation of my study.

Knowledge claims

In attempting to explore other people’s experiences I was clearly operating from an epistemological stance which assumes that experience is a fundamental means through which people come to know things. As Dewey (1925/1929) contends, it is from experience that we construct meaning and “having meaning is a prerequisite for knowing” (p. 330). Moreover, such ‘meaning’ and ‘knowledge’ are vicissitudinous: experience doesn’t have a transcendent essence, but rather reflects the ongoing interaction between humans and their environment over time (Dewey, 1938). Experience then, is the most direct means by which we come to know things. Clearly, I was embracing a pragmatic view of knowledge. I was also assuming that people have the capacity to share their experiential knowledge and that, somehow, what they share ‘counts’ as knowledge. I have never believed that knowledge is exclusively owned by academics; it is, as Bochner (2001) reminds us, something that pertains to “all realms of our lived experience” (p. 135). But on what basis can we claim to ‘know’ anything? Who decides what counts as knowledge?

A legacy from the Enlightenment, Western intellectual thought has long been dominated by the belief that knowledge corresponds with accuracy of representation – representation of things ‘as they really are’. In other words, as the neo-pragmatist Rorty (1979) points out, knowledge claims have been traditionally judged by their capacity to mirror reality or nature. This positioning is predicated on a belief that there is indeed a ‘truth’ or reality out there waiting to be captured. Moreover, those processes employed to capture that ‘truth’ or reality are so “‘privileged’ and ‘foundational’” that they have not required justification (Rorty, 1979,

p. 318); they have become culturally institutionalised. Such traditional approaches to knowledge make no distinction between the natural sciences and human sciences.

Lack of distinction between ways of knowing in the natural sciences and human sciences, through the broad application of traditional approaches, is problematic. First, there is an assumption that humans can be treated as objects. Second, traditional scientific approaches are reductive and atomistic; they bypass the opportunity to capture the holistic nature of human experience. Third, the notion that nothing other than the natural sciences can ever be truly objective is reinforced through these traditional scientific approaches; there is a belief that “...people are somehow always going to be so slimy and slippery...that they will escape ‘objective’ explanation” (Rorty, 1979, p. 346). These traditional positivist beliefs have served to intensify the objective-subjective dichotomy, and in doing so, have cast a shadow over the validity of non-traditional social science inquiry. My exploration of people’s experiences would be “unapologetically subjective” (Ayers, cited in Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 118), and, I believed, valid, but I needed to be able to justify that belief somehow. This led me to a deeper consideration of the nature of ‘objectivity’.

Is it possible to claim any knowledge as purely objective? Is it possible to mirror reality? Barone and Eisner (1997) suggest that, “selection and construal always occur” in any representation of the world (p. 89). Indeed, it was this very notion that caused such vociferous outrage in sections of the intellectual community when Kuhn (1962) dared to suggest that our understanding of science could be influenced by social and political forces – that the emergence of new paradigms illustrated, unequivocally, that there were competing ideas about ‘reality’ and what counted as knowledge. The idea that knowledge could never be independent of the human mind was nothing less than revolutionary.

Geertz (1973) similarly questioned the capacity of ethnographic work to represent things ‘as they really are’. Knowledge claims traditionally equated with “possessing justified true beliefs” (Rorty, 1979, p. 366) have been challenged by Geertz’s (1973) assertion that all anthropological data are “constructions of other people’s constructions” (p. 9), “...and second and third order ones to boot” (p. 15). All anthropological writings are then, according to Geertz (1973), “fictions” as they are “something made”, “something fashioned” (p. 15). If knowledge claims can be considered ‘fiction’ and not based on accuracy of representation, then on what are they based? On what basis were the participants in my study going to be able to claim to ‘know’ anything?

The answer to this question is best encapsulated by the notion of reality as a *creation* rather than a *discovery*. This, according to Tierney (1997), is the basis of the social construction of knowledge. Polkinghorne (1997) reinforces this belief by suggesting that no longer are knowledge claims considered a reflection of reality or logical certainty, but rather “...they are human constructions of models or maps of reality...” (p. 7). And, when the notion of knowledge as a reflection of reality moves to one of knowledge as a social construction, the emphasis moves from a “commensurable discourse” to an “incommensurable discourse” (Rorty, 1979, p. 347), with a focus on negotiated and interpreted meaning of the social world (Kvale, 1996).

What Tierney, Polkinghorne and Rorty, *inter alia*, are alluding to is that not all knowledge needs to be commensurable in the traditional sense – that methods for acquiring knowledge in the sciences must be different from methods for acquiring knowledge in the human sciences. As Bochner (2001) suggests, “knowledge isn’t something that’s tested only against the standards of scientific inquiry” (p. 135). It was then, a “decline of faith in brute fact, set procedures, and unsituated knowledge” (Geertz, 1988, pp. 131-132) that led human science scholars in the last half of last century to reconsider just how knowledge is created.

According to a number of eminent scholars, it is through *conversation* that knowledge is created. Rorty (1979) claims that we understand knowledge when we “understand the social justification of belief” (p. 170). In other words, knowledge need not have an “essence”, but rather should be conceived as a “right...to believe”, and in doing so, conversation can be understood as “the ultimate context within which knowledge is understood” (Rorty, 1979, p. 389). Kvale (1996) goes so far as to suggest that “conversation may be conceived of as a *basic mode of knowing*” (p. 37, emphasis in original). Polkinghorne (1997) concurs, claiming that “knowledge is understood as an agreement reached by a community of scholars” (p. 7). Knowledge, then, need not be conceived as accuracy of representation. I need not expect my participants’ knowledge of their experiences to be mimetic; they would be constructed through their conversation with me.

Both notions – reality as a creation rather than a discovery, and knowledge as a social construction that occurs primarily through conversation – had profound significance for the design and implementation of my study. In concurring with these beliefs, it was clear that I was operating from a *transactional* ontology and epistemology. I was not seeking a literal ‘truth’ from participants that mirrored some perceived ‘reality’ about the phenomenon of re-entry that was waiting to be captured; I was interested in exploring their idiosyncratic experiences and interpretations that resulted from their interactions with the world.

Furthermore, the participants' interpretations (and ultimately, *my* interpretations of *their* interpretations through the process of analysis) unfolded through language – the ultimate medium of social interaction. It is language, according to Freeman (2007) that “gives expression to experience” (p. 925). Indeed, Dewey (1925/1929) contends that “meanings do not come into being without language” (p. 299) and it is language that is “the natural bridge that joins the gap between existence and essence” (p. 167). In highlighting the central role that language plays in the construction of knowledge, Bruner (1986) suggests that, in fact, “...language is our most powerful tool for organising experience, and indeed for constituting ‘realities’...” (p. 8). I was thus positioning myself to adopt a method of data gathering that involved people constructing knowledge through language, primarily conversation. Interviewing was clearly the most appropriate method.

Yet, while I was comfortable with my position on ‘reality’, ‘truth’ and ‘knowledge’, I was still seeking some justification for my intrinsic belief that researching human experience required a methodology quite removed from traditional scientific approaches. I did not believe that there were ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ approaches to research – just different approaches that had different purposes.

Alternative approaches to the human sciences

The dichotomy between science and humanities is, according to Bruner (1986), “an ancient topic, even a tired one” (p. 44). Much of the tension surrounding this dichotomy relates to the apparent desire of many to prove the ascendancy of one over the other. Yet, as Richardson (2000) reminds us, there is more than one way that we might come to know something. Moreover, Rorty (1979) suggests that people aren’t more difficult to understand than things, they just need different approaches and these approaches need not compete, but rather complement each other. Polkinghorne (1988) concurs, suggesting that we need “approaches that are especially sensitive to the unique characteristics of human existence”, not more varied applications of traditional methods (p. x). So, the issue seems not to be so much about the ascendancy of one approach over another, or of objectivity over subjectivity, but rather an acknowledgement of differences in purposes of human inquiry and differences in modes of cognition. Geertz (1973) captures this duality aptly in his claim that ethnographic research is “not an experimental science in search of a law but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (p. 5). So, what are the differences between searching for a ‘law’ and searching for ‘meaning’?

Fundamental purposes of human inquiry

According to Barone (2001, 2007), there are two fundamental purposes of human inquiry. One of those purposes he terms *enhancement of certainty*, developed from, and reflective of Cronbach's (1982) notion that traditional social science aims to reduce uncertainty. That is, it is concerned with reducing doubt, and a desire to understand the world with certainty. Laws help explain and predict that certainty. From this perspective, a literal truth is sought.

The second fundamental purpose of human inquiry, according to Barone (2001, 2007), is *enhancement of meaning*, or more specifically, enhancement of *multiple* meanings (personal communication, June 25, 2002). The core aim of such inquiry is not to 'prove' or 'disprove' anything, but rather question the notion of truth. 'Truth' is considered to be relative – partial, situated and tentative. Considered this way, researchers seeking enhancement of multiple meanings are "truth-makers" rather than "truth-seekers" (Barone, 2000, p. 149). In exploring six individuals' experiences of re-entry, my purpose was clearly *enhancing multiple meanings*. I had no need to enhance certainty – that was manifestly the purpose of much of the existing re-entry research; it was not my purpose.

Paradigmatic and narrative modes of cognition

Bruner (1986) presents a perspective on cognition that complements Barone's (2001, 2007) perspective on the fundamental purposes of human inquiry. Bruner (1986) claims that there are two modes of cognition, each distinctive in the way they construct reality: the *paradigmatic* (or logico-scientific) and the *narrative*. These modes of cognition essentially represent different ways of knowing. The *paradigmatic* way of knowing is illustrative of the Western scientific tradition. Hypotheses are advanced, ideas are categorised into concepts, evidence is reported and conclusions drawn. The focus is a reductionist one; items are defined as instances of a category. It is the paradigmatic mode of cognition, according to Rorty (1979), which has dominated Western intellectual thought to the exclusion of alternative ways of knowing – a situation Rorty clearly felt was in need of revision.

The *narrative* way of knowing, on the other hand, is concerned with human action, with difference and diversity, and with the idiosyncracics of the particular (Barone, personal communication, June 25, 2002), somewhat akin to Aristotle's 'practical knowledge' – that is, contingent knowledge, a way of knowing which depends on context and which is inextricably tied to human action (Eisner, 1997, p. 261). This difference and diversity between humans' experience should not be seen as a complication or a problem, but rather, as Barone and Eisner (1997) claim, "rich sources from which we can learn to experience qualities of the

world that we might not otherwise encounter” (p. 88). Bowman (2006) captures this uniqueness of narrative when reflecting on Rorty’s undergirding argument: “narrative opens up what grand theory tends to shut down” (p. 14).

These two ways of knowing are, according to Bruner (1986), “irreducible to one another” and any attempt to reduce one to the other or ignore one in favour of the other “inevitably fail[s] to capture the rich diversity of thought” (p. 11). I was clearly interested in investigating my participants’ narrative way of knowing; I was interested in difference and diversity and the idiosyncracics of the particular. Narrative inquiry emerged as the most apt methodology for accessing this.

Summary

These scholars – Barone, Bruner, Dewey, Eisner, Geertz, Kuhn, Polkinghorne and Rorty provided the initial theoretical and conceptual basis for my study. Knowledge need not be commensurable in the traditional sense. Knowledge is a social construction and methods for inquiring about knowledge in the natural and the human sciences ought to differ – and not compete – as they serve fundamentally different purposes. As Barone and Eisner (1997) suggest,

the question that needs to be asked, therefore, is not one pertaining to the mimetic features of the work, but whether the work advances understanding, whether it illuminates important qualities, whether it deepens our comprehension of the factors, forces and conditions that animate human beings.
(p. 89)

In this regard, I saw the participants in my study as “generators of new descriptions rather than beings one hopes to be able to describe accurately” (Rorty, 1979, p. 378) and from those new descriptions would come an enhanced understanding of the phenomenon of re-entry.

Narrative

In the previous section, I identified Bruner’s (1986) narrative way of knowing – a mode of cognition through which reality is constructed, a “natural mode through which human beings make sense of lives in time” (Polkinghorne, 1997, p. 13) – as the most applicable to my study. What follows in this section is a detailed description and justification of narrative inquiry –

the methodological approach used in both the collection of data for, and the reporting of, this study.

Defining narrative

Understanding narrative *inquiry*, first requires an understanding of *narrative*. Narrative has long been part of the intellectual tradition in the humanities where it is broadly conceptualised as narratology (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Yet the essence of narrative extends well beyond its place in academia. That narrative is considered by many to be central to human lives is clear from comments such as: “narratives [are] constitutive of humanness” (Adams, 2008, p. 176); “narrative [is] an ancient approach to understanding human affairs” (Ayers, cited in Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 118); “...narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society...[it] is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself” (Barthes, 1977, p. 79); and “the products of narrative schemes are ubiquitous in our lives: they fill our social and cultural environment” (Polkinghorne, 1988, p. 14). Some even suggest that narrative is ontological (Adams, 2008). Ricoeur (1991), for example, claims that narratology is, in fact, a “second-order discourse”, one always preceded by “a narrative understanding stemming from the creative imagination” (p. 24). Clearly, there is a belief in the scholarly community that narrative is integral to the human experience. Understanding this relationship between human experience and narrative is critical.

While definitions of narrative can vary from any spoken or written discourse (see, for example, Bresler, 2006) to a schematic expression in story form (see, for example, Polkinghorne, 1988) to both process and product, and phenomenon and method (see, for example, Clandinin, 2006; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995), it is the definition offered by Polkinghorne (1988), that I believe best explains the relationship between human experience and narrative. He asserts that “narrative is a meaning structure that organises events and human actions into a whole, thereby attributing significance to individual actions and events according to their effect on the whole” (p. 18). Yet Chase (2005) reminds us that as well as describing *what* happened, narratives also provide insight into people’s thoughts, emotions and interpretations. Thus, narrative is one of our most fundamental ways of making meaning from experience. It provides a structure for ordering, through *emplotment* (Ricoeur, 1984), seemingly disparate events in our lives. As Bruner (1990) reminds us, “people do not deal with the world event by event or with text sentence by sentence. They frame events and sentences in larger structures” (p. 64).

Ricoeur (1984) also reminds us of the significance of time in any understanding of narrative. Narrative is essentially a representation of the human experience of time. Polkinghorne (1995) elaborates the significance of time in any understanding of narrative through highlighting Vanhoozer's comparison between painting and narrative: "just as painting is a *visual* representation which shapes or configures *space*, so narrative is a *verbal* representation of reality which shapes or configures *time*" (p. 18, emphasis in original). Narrative is, then, "retrospective meaning making"; it shapes and orders past events (Chase, 2005, p. 656).

Retrospection implicates memory. While memory is a complex phenomenon, "easily maligned", it is, as Barone (2001) hastens to add, "the glue that holds meaning together, that allows for a life story to be fashioned and related" (p. 165). Without memory, there is no story to tell, no narrative; there are only disconnected fragments.

The participants in my study would be making sense of their re-entry experiences by recounting a number of events and actions, not as discrete entities, but framed within stories (the products of narrative discourse), unfolding temporally, that had beginnings, middles and endings. In this way, their experience would be expressed and understood narratively and holistically, not discretely. Much of the existing re-entry literature to date fragments, rather than unifies experience. Yet, this is more a reflection of traditional approaches to the social sciences than something peculiar to re-entry research.

Traditional approaches to social sciences are reductionist and atomistic; they represent a belief that understanding is enhanced by taking things apart. This belief, rather than being construed as an entirely deliberate attempt to refuse acknowledgement of alternative ways of knowing, can be viewed as a culturally embedded practice. Fragmentation or compartmentalisation has dominated Western thought patterns since ancient Greek times. Embodied in the notion of *individual agency*, such thought patterns manifest in a dissection of the known world into discrete objects with particular attributes, all of which can then be categorised (Nisbett, 2005). Hall (1976), some three decades ago, highlighted the dangers associated with such an approach: "...in his strivings for order, Western man has created chaos by denying that part of his self that integrates while enshrining the parts that fragment experience" (p. 7).

Such fragmentation of experience, according to Kingwell (2002), seriously compromises our capacity to make meaning of the whole, and in doing so, "reduces the number of meaningful ways we have to talk about the world" (p. 8). Polkinghorne (1988) agrees with the problematic outcomes of such fragmentation, highlighting, for example, the inherent

difference between understanding the action of hydrogen atoms and oxygen atoms as disparate entities, and understanding their combination as water. As I read the substantive literature it became increasingly evident to me that a good deal of the empirically-based research on re-entry fragmented the experience into separate compartments (for example, coping strategies, depression levels, skill development, relationship patterns). A narrative approach offered the most effective way of avoiding this fragmentation of experience.

Defining narrative inquiry

Narrative inquiry refers to the process through which narrative serves a *research* purpose. It is distinguishable from other forms of qualitative research as it “deals with individual lives” (Polkinghorne interviewed in Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p. 633). Although, as Clandinin, Pushor and Orr (2007) assert, some may perceive narrative inquiry as “an ‘easy’ kind of research” – “just telling stories” (p. 21) – it is no longer considered necessary to argue for a place for narrative inquiry in qualitative research. That time has passed. Philosophical positioning is now well defended. “Today narrative inquiry is flourishing; it is everywhere” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 641). Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) confirm this by referring to “the explosion of research under the broad heading of narrative inquiry” (p. 70). Yet, Chase (2005) reminds us that it is still “a field in the making”. Part of Chase’s caution, while not questioning the now firmly-established place of narrative inquiry within qualitative research, relates to her definition of narrative inquiry as “an amalgam of interdisciplinary analytic lenses, diverse disciplinary approaches, and both traditional and innovative methods – all revolving around an interest in biographical particulars as narrated by the one who lives them” (p. 651). Clearly, there is scope for great diversity in the way that narrative inquiry is conceptualised and defined.

Narrative inquiry is conceptualised and defined at both a macro and micro level.

Polkinghorne (1995), for example, defines narrative inquiry globally as, “a subset of qualitative research designs in which stories are used to describe human action” (p. 5). Those stories may be oral or written, may be accessed formally through interview or informally through naturally occurring conversation, and they may be stories that cover an entire life or a specific aspect of a life (Chase, 2005). Yet within the subset of narrative inquiry, Chase (2005) identifies, more specifically, numerous terms used to describe the empirical material researchers study – life history, life story, personal narrative, oral history, performance narrative and testimonio, for example – many of which are used varyingly and interchangeably by narrative inquirers. I have termed the six accounts in this study *personal narratives*, as they represent participants sharing “a compelling topical narration” rather than

a biography, autobiography, or whole of life story that are often inferred with the use of the terms *life history* or *life story* (Chase, 2005, p. 652).

Although a diverse field, the common link that binds all forms of narrative inquiry is an interest in studying experience (Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Herein lay the most explicit link with my study's aim. Also congruent with my pragmatic perspective on experience, discussed earlier in this chapter, is Clandinin's and Rosiek's (2007) claim that narrative inquirers assume experience to be "the first and most fundamental reality we have" (p. 44). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind us that "experience happens narratively" (p. 19) and that "narrative inquiry is a way of understanding experience" (p. 20). A narrative inquiry approach clearly emerged as the most effective for gathering data and reporting on that data because, in Chase's (1995) words, "...all forms of narrative share the fundamental interest in making sense of experience, the interest in constructing and communicating meaning" (p. 273).

Bochner (2001) suggests that critics of narrative tend to focus on its capacity (or rather, incapacity) to capture facts. Yet this suggests that the purpose of narrative inquiry as a research approach has been misunderstood. The focus is not on capturing facts, but rather on the articulation of *meaning* of experience. Any narrative is, therefore, a partial, temporal, situated account reflecting the social, political and historical moment. It can never be a reflection of 'truth', reality or fact. Indeed, Lieblich (2006) describes any attempt at achieving an objective truth through narrative inquiry as "an illusion" (p. 76). Understanding this illusory nature of objective truth is, according to Ely (2007), "key to narrative research" (p. 581).

Narrative inquiry, then, signals a move *away from* traditional ways of knowing and telling in the social sciences towards multiple ways of knowing and telling, *away from* traditional quests for objectivity towards a celebrated acceptance of subjectivity, *away from* grand narratives towards local narratives and *away from* facts and towards meanings (Bochner, 2001). The methodological approach adopted in my study was congruent with all these 'turns'.

The centrality of meaning

Meaning is symbiotically related to experience. Understanding the meaning of experience is, according to Mezirow (1997), "a defining condition of being human" (p. 5). It is perhaps not surprising then, to read of claims such as: "humans are inextricably driven to search for order

and meaning in their own and others' lives" (Orbuch, 1997, p. 455). Indeed, this seemingly innate desire to make meaning is illustrated through both Mishler's (1986) and Riesmann's (2003) assertion that people demonstrate a natural impulse to narrate stories, unsolicited, in interviews. The centrality of meaning is diminished in traditional forms of research where there is a belief that what people *do* is somehow more trustworthy, real and true than what people *say* (Bruner, 1990). Narrative inquiry, as a research approach, recognises that what people *say* is valid, doesn't have to be verified against traditional criteria in order to count as knowledge, and can enhance our understanding of the human condition. In fact, Bruner (1990) suggests that "saying and doing represent a functionally inseparable unit" (p. 19). In providing opportunities for people to share their experiences in depth, and make meaning from those experiences – to make meaning *central* – my study demonstrably concurred with both Bruner's (1990) and Mishler's (1986) belief in the fundamental need to elevate meaning to a central place in studies of human experience. Significantly, participants were making meaning not only of the world – specifically the phenomenon of re-entry – but of themselves as well (Bruner, 1990). As the researcher and co-constructor in the meaning-making exercise, I, too, drew meaning from the interaction about both the phenomenon and the participants.

Cross-disciplinarity

Adopting narrative inquiry as a methodological approach essentially meant that my study did not fit within any single disciplinary field. A number of narrative scholars acknowledge this cross-disciplinarity (see, for example, Chase, 2005; Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007), a situation described by Rosiek (2003) as the "zeitgeist of our current academic times" (p. 166). Geertz (1983), in referring to "blurred genres" (p. 19), essentially foreshadowed the notion that "an individual's discipline no longer provides the rules for research" (Tierney, 2002, p. 388). I wasn't, therefore, seeking to conduct a piece of 'psychological', 'sociological', 'anthropological' or 'educational' research; I was blurring the boundaries. When conceived as a primary way through which people make sense of their lives, narrative cannot be allocated to any one discipline. People do not experience events solely on a psychological plane or solely on an educational plane, for example. Life is experienced holistically. Narrative is the naturalistic expression of that holistic experience.

Why narrative?

The previous discussion has highlighted some of the key reasons why narrative inquiry emerged as the most appropriate for meeting this study's aim – it: honours the narrative way of knowing, of making sense of experience through storying; focuses on meaning rather than

fact; and views experience holistically rather than discretely. All these characteristics were congruent with my ontological and epistemological positioning, as well as being best suited to meeting my study's aim. Yet, from a research perspective, narrative inquiry, as a methodological approach, offers the possibility of a more expansive contribution to knowledge, and it was this that confirmed my belief that it was the most appropriate methodological approach to employ.

While the focus in narrative inquiry is on the particular, the unique and the idiosyncratic nature of experience, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) remind us of Dewey's assertion that individuals cannot be considered only as individuals; they are always in relation with others, always in a social context. In other words, "the self is a social phenomenon" (Church, 1995, p. 5). Thus, individual experience, captured through narrative inquiry, allows us greater insight into, and understanding of, broad social phenomena (Chase, 1995; Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995).

While not explicitly articulated in relation to narrative inquiry, this belief in the inextricable link between personal and social, has been highlighted by a number of scholars in varying disciplines over time. Geertz (1973), for example, dispels "privacy theories of meaning", claiming that "culture is public because meaning is" (p. 12). Bruner (1990), similarly, claims that "by virtue of participation in culture, meaning is rendered public and shared" (pp. 12-13). More recently, Riesmann (1993) claims that "culture 'speaks itself' through an individual's story" (p. 5). Individual experience, then, is both *idiosyncratic* and *personal*, as well as *social* and *public*. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005) extends our understanding of this inherent relationship between the personal and the social and provides insight into what researchers might learn from poets and storytellers. She writes: "a persistent irony recognised and celebrated by novelists, poets and playwrights is that as one moves closer to the unique characteristics of a person or a place, one discovers the universal" (p. 12). Just as in the art of portraiture, specific insight or angle can transform our understanding of the whole (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2005). Thus, the particular can inform the general. This is not to suggest, however, that the purpose of narrative inquiry is, or should be, generalising to a larger population. Indeed, much debate surrounds this in the literature – an issue considered in more detail in the next chapter.

Suffice to say, my purpose in exploring the re-entry experiences of individuals narratively, extended beyond insight into their own individual meaning-making. While this was a core purpose, it was not the sole purpose. Insight into individual experiences allowed me parallel insight into the broader phenomenon of re-entry. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) point out,

“stories lived and told educate the self and others” (p. xxvi). While this notion of storytelling as a method of informing others is not new – Eisner (1997), for example, asserts that “humans have used storied forms to inform since human have been able to communicate” (p. 264) – using storied form to inform others as an outcome of research inquiry is relatively new.

I concur with Bowman (2006), in that it is not my intention to present narrative inquiry as “the salvation of the [research] world”; to do so would simply make narrative inquiry “another orthodoxy” (p. 14). Narrative inquiry is simply the method best suited to meeting the aims of this research study and addressing the gaps in the literature, while remaining congruent with my ontological and epistemological beliefs.

Interviewing

Earlier in this chapter, I introduced interviewing as the most appropriate method for gathering data in my study. This was primarily a result of my shared belief with a number of scholars that knowledge is constructed through social interaction, most notably, conversation. Furthermore, I was exploring people’s experiences of a social and cultural phenomenon, and, as Holstein and Gubrium (2003) point out, “interviewing provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives” (p. 3). More particularly, the meaning of experience is understood and shared narratively, thus interviewing seemed a germane method for collecting these storied accounts. As Chase (1995) asserts, “if we take seriously the idea that people make sense of experience and communicate meaning through narration, *then in-depth interviews should become occasions in which we ask for life stories*” (p. 274, emphasis in original). Having decided upon interviewing, the next step in my methodological decision-making was focussing on the *style* and *structure* of those interviews.

Interview style

In terms of the *style* of interview, Mishler (1986), in particular, and to a lesser extent, Chase (1995, 2005), Holstein and Gubrium (2003) and Kvale (1996) were particularly influential in my thinking. Mishler (1986) maintains that interviews should be conceived as interactional, not stimulus-response. In other words, interviews should be viewed more as linguistic events than behavioural events, a notion in keeping with Bruner’s (1990) assertion that what people *say* has traditionally been considered less significant than what people *do*. Viewed from this perspective, “a question may more usefully be thought of as part of a circular process through which meaning and that of its answer are created”, rather than “a stimulus having a

predetermined and presumably shared meaning and intended to elicit a response” (p. 53). This approach to interviewing, Mishler (1986) claims, is far better suited to studying human experience than the traditional approach.

...The standard approach to interviewing is demonstrably inappropriate for and inadequate to the study of the central questions in the social and behavioural sciences, namely, how individuals perceive, organise, give meaning to, and express their experiences and their worlds. Further, the traditional approach neglects to examine how their understandings are related to their social, cultural and personal circumstances. (p. ix)

Thus, I decided upon an interactional style of interviewing, a style that “opened up” interviews and encouraged storytelling (Mishler, 1986, p. 199), a style that didn’t perceive interviews merely as “window[s] into people’s minds” (Travers, 2006, p. 270). This style of interviewing was premised on the belief that knowledge was not only *constructed* during interviews, but essentially *co-constructed* between the participants and me, as interviewer.

A number of writers attest to the potential that interviews afford as opportunities for knowledge construction. Kvale (1986), for example, refers to interviews as “construction site[s] for knowledge” (p. 14). Holstein and Gubrium (2003), likewise, view interviews as “more than simple information-gathering operation[s]”; they are, rather, “social encounter[s] in which knowledge is constructed... “(p. 3). But the style of questioning in interviews must *invite* that knowledge-creation response; despite Mishler’s (1986) and Riesmann’s (2003) claim that people have an innate urge to narrate during interviews, it doesn’t happen automatically. ‘Closed’ questions for example can shut down opportunities for people to narrate. Thus, I needed an interview style that opened up, rather than closed down, opportunities for narration.

Drawing upon Kvale’s (1996) notion of the interviewer as a “traveller” rather than a “miner” (p. 4), I chose to ‘travel’ with the participants, collecting stories and guiding the conversation based on the responses provided, rather than seeking responses to a predetermined set of questions. I was also influenced by Chase’s (1995) discussion of Polanyi’s distinction between *stories* and *reports*. *Stories*, she contends, place the narrator at the centre of the interview; they assume the primary responsibility for transmitting a message and making the relevance of that message apparent. In this way, “by focussing on narratives...we leave the definition of the unit of investigation up to the people, rather than imposing categories

derived from our own ever-shifting theoretical frames” (E. Bruner, 1986, p. 9). *Reports*, on the other hand, are elicited by the interviewer; the interviewer assumes primary responsibility for guiding the direction of the discussion and making interpretations. If I were to seek stories, rather than reports, from my participants, I needed to not only explicitly ask for stories, but I needed to create the type of trusting relationship with them that would encourage such sharing. This issue of relationship between the participants and interviewer is clearly an element that plays a critical role in determining the extent to which participants feel comfortable not only in narrating, but assuming responsibility for the direction of the discussion. This is something that will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Similarly, I was influenced by Lawrence-Lightfoot’s (2005) discussion of Welty’s distinction between listening *for* a story and listening *to* a story. Listening *to* a story casts the interviewer in a passive, receptive role, one which has limited impact on the shape of the discourse. Listening *for* a story, on the other hand, casts the interviewer in an active, engaged role, one which plays a critical role in the shaping of the discourse. While on first consideration this may seem antithetical to the previous claim that I was seeking stories and not reports, and thus placing the import for the talk primarily with the participant and not the interviewer, the two approaches are not opposed. The distinction lay in the notion of co-construction. As Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) claim, “listening for a story is at the heart of the process of co-constructing narrative” (p. 120). My self-disclosure, as the interviewer, played a central role in this regard. This also will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

The interview as a co-construction

In adopting an open-ended, interactional interviewing style, I was clearly operating from a perspective that viewed interviewing as a non-linear process. I was influencing the participants, they were influencing me and from that emerged *our* constructed reality of the situation (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007). Thus, we were essentially co-constructing understandings and meanings. As Holstein and Gubrium (2003) point out:

interviewers are deeply and unavoidably implicated in creating meanings that ostensibly reside within respondents. Both parties to the interview are necessarily and unavoidably involved in this process. Meaning is not merely elicited by apt questioning, nor simply transported through respondent replies; it is actively and socially assembled in the interview encounter.” (p. 4)

Even token responses by the interviewer, such as ‘Hmm’, for example, can be interpreted as confirmation by the participant that what they are sharing is considered ‘right’ (Mishler, 1986). To consider the interviewer’s engagement in dialogue with participants as neutral is naïve at best and unethical at worst. Interactional interviews, then, imply a “joint construction of meaning” (Mishler, 1986, p. 52). Narayan’s and George’s (2003) claim that the word *interview* has etymological roots in Old French and once meant ‘to see one another’, assumes particular significance when considered in this light of interviews as occasions for joint constructions of meanings.

Recruitment

The substantive literature on re-entry had confirmed that students and business personnel were the two most consistently researched groups. Yet, with both these groups there was a notable absence of in-depth narrative studies. As mentioned in Chapter 1, it was not my intention in this study to focus on the peculiarities of *student* experiences (although clearly, issues specifically pertaining to students would emerge in the interviews); students were merely the lens through which the phenomenon of re-entry would be explored. It was the *phenomenon* that was at the core of my interest. The main justification I used for this decision to focus on just one group (that is, students) to explore the phenomenon of re-entry, was that the substantive literature indicated that, whilst there would be issues of specific relevance to particular groups (for example, for students in returning to previous academic institutions or for business personnel in returning to previous business positions), many of the core affective, behavioural and cognitive experiences associated with re-entry were common across groups. Thus, I was confident that recruiting only students to participate in the study would still yield valuable data on the re-entry phenomenon *per se*.

In many ways, my decision to recruit students as the sole participants in my study was convenient; I was a lecturer in a university that offered international student exchange programs. My first step in undertaking this recruitment process was to seek permission to conduct the study: permission was duly granted by the University of Tasmania’s Social Sciences Ethics Committee. That I held a lecturing position in the same university in which the students participating in this study were enrolled, may, theoretically, have proven disadvantageous for ethical reasons. However, it proved to be advantageous, particularly in regard to the logistics of recruiting subjects and meeting with them. My lecturing position was not attached to any particular faculty. Rather, I worked within a centrally administered unit that provided support to both students and staff in all faculties. This privileged position

gave me access to knowledge, resources and networks within the institution, yet afforded me useful ‘distance’ from individual students as my work was almost exclusively with staff. I was not personally known to any of the participants in this study prior to recruitment. Nor was I expected, in the immediate future, to be in any position of ‘authority’ with these students. I felt that any potential negative impact on students as a result of my university position was negligible.

Despite the logistical advantage my position afforded, the recruiting stage of the research process was a fraught and anxiety-ridden one for me. Because I wanted to capture, longitudinally, the re-entry experiences of international exchange students, it was essential that I meet with them as soon as possible after their re-entry to Australia (justification for this longitudinal approach will be presented later in this chapter). My intention was to interview these students at 1-2 months after re-entry to Australia, than again after 3-4 months, and finally after 5-6 months. My plan was to conduct interviews during the first semester of the year. This meant identifying those students who were completing international exchanges at the end of second semester of the previous year and who were expected to return to university study in semester one the following year.

The Study Abroad and Exchange Co-ordinator for the university, acting in the role of third party, identified 16 students who met this criterion. I was not attempting to recruit a ‘sample’ (in the traditional sense of the term) as it was not my intention to generalise findings to a broader population; this was clearly anathema to the philosophy underpinning narrative inquiry. My goal was, as Stake (1995) highlights in case study research, “particularisation, not generalisation” (p. 8). The only criterion the students needed to meet was that they had recently returned from overseas. Thus, these 16 students were subsequently mailed information and consent packages prior to the commencement of the first semester following their exchange. The packages were approved by the University of Tasmania’s Social Sciences Ethics Committee and contained information related to the purpose of the study, the participants’ right to withdraw and so on. Some researchers (see, for example, Hollway & Jefferson, 2000; Josselson, 2007) believe it best, at times, not to divulge too much detail about interview style, or specific content focus to their participants prior to the interview, for fear of dissuading their subjects from participating fully, or having participants pre-empting responses through a narrow interpretive lens. Yet, the open-ended, narrative style and the content focus of the three interviews I planned to undertake were clearly and explicitly shared with potential participants in the information sheet. This seemed to me to be a critical part of gaining and maintaining participants’ trust. Furthermore, the information sheet and consent form included details related to the role that participants would play in the construction of the final narrative – a decision congruent with my constructivist philosophy that the researcher

and the researched co-construct understandings and texts. I had my first affirmative response within a week.

A phone conversation with my initial respondent revealed a vibrant, excitable young woman, sharing, unprompted, her recent experience of “*stopping off in South America*” on the way home. This conversation confirmed all my stereotypical notions of international exchange students and created a renewed sense of euphoria in my study. My first contact with a participant somehow made it feel ‘real’ for the first time. Somewhat naively, I believed this was going to be a replicable pattern in my recruitment process. The substantive literature I had read highlighted the common desire of returning sojourners to find genuine ‘listeners’ for their overseas stories. Personally, I had craved a responsive audience upon re-entry. I was aiming to interview only six students in total in my study; surely, I would get five more responses pretty quickly?

Yet my hopes turned to frustration and anxiety as many of the remaining 15 packages were returned to my mailbox marked ‘return to sender’. The unopened mail was not, despite initial appearances, a reflection of lack of interest on the part of the students, but rather a reflection of the fraught nature of attempting to locate accurate contact details for mobile, transient students, many of whom had, quite understandably, cancelled previous tenancy arrangements prior to travelling overseas, and some of whom had also decided to travel more widely prior to returning to Australia. As evidence of this global roaming, two of the participants in my study arrived home to discover that their new academic year’s courses had already begun! A second round mail out to students’ ‘home addresses’ rather than ‘semester addresses’ (for many students, ‘home address’ translated as parents’ addresses) revealed a similar silence. It was now the beginning of semester. My anxiety levels rose. This was the initial ‘fertile’ re-entry time I needed to be exploring. If I couldn’t recruit another five students quickly, I’d have to postpone my data gathering for 12 months. I was feeling conflicting emotions – self-indulgent frustration that my study process was being hijacked and, having personally experienced re-entry, empathy for these students who were probably too busy finding somewhere to live and reacquainting with family and friends to be concerned with responding to an academic’s request for participation in a research project.

However, within the next three weeks, I had my remaining five participants, primarily a serendipitous result of working in the same university as the potential participants. A colleague from another faculty, aware of my research project, and acting in the role of International Co-ordinator within her faculty, contacted me and informed me that she had, during a debriefing session with the returning international exchange students in her faculty,

asked if any of them had heard about my research. None of them had. None of them had received either of the two mail outs. As students returning from an international exchange at the end of the previous year, they would have been included in the original mail out. This confirmed my suspicions. As a result, I applied for and had approved, an amendment to the *process* outlined in my Ethics application. This proved to be a turning point in the recruitment process. Now, each of the six faculty International Co-ordinators in the university would act as third party and personally hand the information and consent packages to those students in their faculties who had recently returned from overseas exchanges. Five new participants contacted me in quick succession and agreed to participate in my study.

Throughout the recruitment and the interviewing phases I maintained a research journal – one that captured my thoughts and feelings as the study unfolded. The entries were a mix of emotional and intellectual responses with four key foci – me (as the researcher), the participants, the research process itself, and the emerging data. While deeply imbued with meaning at the time, such thoughts and feelings are rarely accessible in detail, months, and years, later, if not recorded in some way. Thus, maintaining a journal seemed the most reliable method for accessing this information during the analysis and write-up phases of this study. I make reference to a number of these journal entries in the next section of this chapter.

Three participants were located at the campus on which I was based and three were located at another campus, two and a half hours drive away. I taught occasionally on the second campus. The next logistical step was attempting to co-ordinate students' timetables with my teaching responsibilities on both campuses.

Coordinating the data gathering

Once again, my lecturing role within the university proved to be an advantage. Most of my contact with the six participants occurred through the university email system, a communication channel accessed consistently by staff and students alike. Communication was quick and reliable. Mutually agreeable times were established for each of the three interviews with the six participants. Mostly, the interviews occurred as scheduled, although, as to be expected with university students, study commitments at times resulted in some re-scheduling. The degree of emotional investment I had in the *timing* of these interviews – so fundamental to this study – became evident when attempting to negotiate meeting times for the interviews. At one point I recorded in my research journal:

X pulled out of her final interview today, at the last minute, because she has too many assignments to complete. She can't spare the time. She is not sure when, or even if, she can complete the final interview as she will return to her home town next week for a period of two months. I was somewhat surprised by the strength of my initial reaction – another reminder of how much I have invested in this study. I am now contemplating making the four hour drive to her home town to complete the final interview. (16/05/06)

My use of the term “pulled out”, rather than “was unable to make”, for example, is clear evidence of the emotional investment in this process. This participant did re-schedule late the following week before going home. As further evidence of the fragility of timely access, my eighteenth, and final, interview was re-scheduled three times (at the request of the participant), all within a two day period and eventually took place in the participant's home. The location certainly changed the dynamics of the interview as she attended to her cat, her flat mate and her cooking. It was a somewhat surreal experience and lasted just 40 minutes. The vast majority of interviews were, however, unhindered by matters of logistics.

Over an intense four month period, from March to June, I conducted three iterations of interviews with these six participants – 18 interviews in total. Each lasted an average of 60 – 90 minutes, yet there was distinct variation between participants. One participant, for example, revealed an interesting mixture of insecurity, reticence and succinctness, her three interviews each lasting a little less than one hour. Another participant was a reflective, articulate, engaging storyteller, his three interviews each lasting over 90 minutes. This situation was resonant of both Hollway's and Jefferson's (2000) and Narayan's and George's (2003) reminder to narrative researchers that participants are not all equally skilled storytellers. My journal, likewise, revealed this disparity. *“Today I feel the tension, acutely, between ‘mining’ for information and just letting them tell their stories. They don't all seem to be storytellers in the same way”* (23/05/06). This four month period, then, March – June, captured the participants' re-entry experiences over three temporal phases – 1-2 months, 3-4 months and 5-6 months – post-sojourn.

All the interviews, bar the final one, took place either in my office on my home town campus, or in a meeting room on the second campus. Although not genuinely ‘neutral spaces’ (they were familiar to me, but not to the participants), they were ‘neutral’ in terms of the participants' previous university experiences. None of them had ever seen or used these

spaces during their time at university, or were likely to in the future. Thus, they had no ‘history’ with the spaces. At the same time, however, these spaces were within the university environment and were not, therefore, alien.

Each interview was digitally recorded and later transcribed. The transcriptions were detailed and captured verbal nuances, pauses, emotions and so on; they were not ‘sanitised’ in any way. This level of detail proved invaluable during the analysis stage.

Structuring the interviews

The in-depth, open-ended interviewing style adopted in this study did not equate with lack of structure in the interview sequence. Seidman’s (1998) three stage approach, acknowledged by Seidman as being based on the original work of Dolbeare and Schuman, provided the core structure for the interview sequence in this study. Whilst not employed mimetically, Seidman’s structure provided an overarching framework for my interview sequence. Its selection was based on a number of significant considerations. First, it provided a *focus* for each interview and thus contributed to the generation of useful, purposeful data. Second, having an interview *sequence* was consonant with my belief that the development of a relationship with participants is crucial, not only from an ethical perspective, but also in terms of eliciting valid data. Third, the sequential nature of the interview structure also allowed participants to revisit and review previous data – adding and subtracting – an outcome consonant not only with longitudinal studies, but also with the notion of narrative as an evolving phenomenon.

Other than the primary data collection method of interviewing, three other methods of data collection, namely photo elicitation, artefact making/collecting and participant writing, were used to complement and support the interview process in three ways. First, these methods of data collection were springboards for conversation in the initial stages of each interview. Second, they subsequently provided a ‘frame’ for the direction of the ensuing conversation in each interview. Third, they helped retain the structural integrity of the three stage approach advocated by Seidman by ensuring that each interview had a specific focus. These data collection methods have been identified by Clandinin and Connelly (2000) as appropriate for generating the data integral to the collection, analysis and subsequent construction of narratives.

Pilot interview

Prior to conducting the interviews with students I undertook a pilot interview with a colleague who had lived and taught overseas. This occurred just days prior to undertaking my

first official interview. The primary purpose of this pilot interview was to ‘test’ the open-ended nature of my planned interview style where I assumed the role of “traveller” rather than “miner” (Kvale, 1996, pp. 3-4) and asked for “stories” rather than “reports” (Chase, 1995, p. 274). Furthermore, this pilot interview was designed to investigate the usefulness of the discussion ‘prompts’ – the photographs, artefact and vignettes.

What emerged from this pilot interview was, first, a need to explain more carefully the role and purpose of the artefact and, second, the value of the vignettes for discussion. My journal underscored this inherent value: *“It is clear that the vignettes are going to be the richest part of the interview process”* (18/03/06). Perhaps the greatest insight gleaned was the ease with which my colleague simply narrated. Stories unfolded. I felt confident that narrative data would be forthcoming from my participants.

Interview one

The first interview was not exclusively focussed on the re-entry experience. Rather, it was designed to create a *context* for understanding the participants’ re-entry experience. Thus, initial prompts included, ‘Please share with me the process of how you came to be studying in X country’, ‘Tell me about any other cross-cultural experiences you’ve had before going to X country’, and ‘Tell me about some of your memories of living and studying in X country’. Insight into where the participants had lived and studied, and how they experienced that context, was crucial in helping me better understand their experience of coming home. As Peshkin (2001) contends, using history as a lens to enhance our perception in research is propitious “because knowing what happened earlier is critical for grasping the meaning of what currently is going on” (p. 243). I needed an insight into what happened during their exchange before I could validly understand their current re-entry experience. Furthermore, as discussed in Chapter Two, and as will be discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Four, re-entry is one part of the *process* of cultural adjustment. The overseas experience, then, informs the re-entry process.

Participants had been requested, initially through the Information Sheet distributed during the recruitment stage, and then via email prior to the first interview, to select and bring along to discuss, three photographs or images from their overseas experience that were significant to them in some way. As well as acknowledging a dominant perspective in the cross-cultural literature of re-entry being intricately related to – and not disparate from – the overseas experience (see, for example, Hanratty, 2001; Martin & Harrell, 1996), this initial interview focus conformed with Seidman’s assertion that in order to explore the meaning of experience, such exploration must be within a context. Drawing upon Dewey’s notion of experience,

Clandinin (2006) likewise claims that people's experiences cannot be understood in isolation; they are relational, temporal and contextual. Thus, photo elicitation in this first interview did far more than simply provide a background; it acknowledged the integral role of context within narrative inquiry.

There was no expectation that the participants themselves took the photographs or created the images used in this first interview, although most did. The interview was thus structured around conversation related to *what* these images portrayed and *why* they were seen as significant. The guiding questions in this first interview were: 'Please tell me about this photo/image'; 'Why did you choose this photo/image to share?'; 'Why is this photo significant?', and 'What do you feel when you look at this image now?'

Rather than being viewed as objective records of reality, these photographs and images instead provided an opportunity for "dynamic interaction" between the participant, the image, and me as interviewer, a situation in which "meaning [was] actively constructed , not passively received" (Schwartz, 1989, p. 120). The capacity of visual images to prompt discussion which otherwise might not arise during an interview situation is well documented (see, for example, Emmison, 2004; Harper, 2000; Schwartz, 1989). In support of this, Clandinin and Connelly (1994) highlight the fact that photographs reflect particular memories, memories around which stories are constructed. In the context of narrative inquiry, they refer to this process as "an archaeology of memory and meaning" (p. 114). This early phase of the first interview, then, was co-construction epitomised.

It is important to note that, whilst not the *focus* of this first interview, discussion pertaining to re-entry did occur, further reinforcing the notion that re-entry is an integral part of the three-part process of: preparation for departure, overseas experience and re-entry itself. Most importantly, the discussion of re-entry that did arise during the first interview provided the first iteration of longitudinal data.

Interview two

The second interview was designed to explore participants' *current* experiences, namely, their experience of re-entry to their home culture. Thus, the opening prompt in the second interview was, 'Tell me what it's like being home.' As in the first interview, participants were asked to prepare for the second interview. First, they were asked to make or collect, and bring to the interview to discuss, an object or artefact that in some way reflected their experience of re-entry. Second, they were asked to write three vignettes that described incidents/events/experiences that they had been involved in or witnessed since coming home,

that were somehow related to their having lived and studied overseas, and then having come home. Typically these incidents would have puzzled, confused, humoured, frustrated, fascinated or perplexed the participants in some way.

Although not described to participants as metaphoric, the process of artefact making/collection served not only to prompt discussion, but reflected the unique capacity of metaphor to encapsulate experience, to “capture the essence of life” (Osland, 1995, p. 10). The essence of metaphor, according to Richardson (2000), is “experiencing and understanding one thing in terms of another” (p. 926). Thus, metaphor allows us to understand and make sense of our experiences from a level of abstraction not readily accessible through conventional methods of analysis. Richardson (2000) also highlights the capacity of metaphor to link disparate parts into “a functional, coherent whole” (p. 926). The discussion surrounding the artefact, therefore, allowed the participants to make meaning from their re-entry experience by envisaging it holistically in abstract form. They were asked to explain in what way the artefact captured their experience of re-entry.

The bulk of the discussion in the second interview, however, revolved around participants’ sharing of the three vignettes. Originally used as discussion prompts by Furnham and Bochner (1986) in their Social Skills Training Model, vignettes in my study operated similarly to the ‘critical incident vignettes’ prepared by international students in a re-entry transition workshop in Arthur’s (2003) study; they were based on prior experience and were used to generate discussion in a current context. I was also motivated to use vignettes on the basis of the positive outcomes of their use in an undergraduate module I had devised with a colleague for overseas exchange students from our university. In this module, the vignettes provided a concrete structure around which students could deconstruct affective, behavioural and cognitive responses to their overseas experience. I was confident that vignettes would have similarly positive outcomes with re-entry as the focus.

As reconstructions of the details of current experience, the vignettes allowed some of the focus of the interview to remain on the descriptions of concrete situations – a core function of Seidman’s second stage. Participants were asked to read their vignettes, one at a time. After each reading, questions such as, ‘What was it about that particular incident that captured your attention?’, ‘Tell me some more about that particular time’, ‘What were you thinking/feeling when that happened?’ and ‘Can you describe any other similar experiences?’ were designed to encourage further detailed narration. This second interview, then, provided rich and detailed insight into participants’ lived experience of being home, primarily through the sharing of stories and the meaning made from those stories.

Seidman advocates a strict adherence to the structure of his interview sequence; meaning-making, for example, is not designed to be the focus of the second interview. He does, however, recognise that some meaning-making will naturally occur in all three interviews as any linguistic representation of experience inherently involves a meaning-making process. So, in this regard, I deliberately departed from Seidman's structure, seeking and encouraging the sharing of stories and meaning-making, not only in this, the second interview, but in all three interviews.

Interview three

Seidman identifies the purpose of the third interview as reflecting on the meaning of experience. Given that much of this had occurred during the second interview in my study, I was concerned that, if I followed Seidman's structure faithfully in the third interview, little new data would be revealed. Clearly, I needed to modify the purpose and structure of the third interview. My guide in this modification process was to revisit my study's overarching methodological purpose – collecting *longitudinal* data related to the development in affective, behavioural and cognitive responses to being home. Once again, I departed from strict adherence to Seidman's structure for the third interview. The first question in my final interview became 'It is now 5/6 months since you've returned from your exchange. Can you tell me how you're currently feeling about being home?' Yet, I needed a more definitive structure to follow on from this initial question.

For the next step, I re-read participants' vignettes (from the second interview) to them and asked what sense they *now* made of those events. This was designed to reveal the extent to which participants' understanding or interpretation of events had changed since the last interview. This process revealed some fascinating insights into participants' re-entry development. In my journal I recorded, "*I was surprised by how much discussion this elicited*" (05/06/06). For some participants, their thoughts and feelings about re-entry had been affirmed. For others, they had developed completely new perspectives on events.

In the final stage of the third interview I handed each participant a two page synopsis I had crafted from listening to the recording of their first two interviews. In essence, this was my initial attempt at putting in writing, my interpretation of their experiences as shared. It was important for me that I receive some feedback from the participants, not only because I believed this was one way of enhancing the validity of my interpretation of their experiences, but also I had made it clear to the participants in the recruitment stage that they would have some role in co-constructing the meaning of this research.

As a way of providing some structure for each synopsis, I attempted to present them as my interpretation of the effect of re-entry on their *personal, social and academic* lives. This proved to be an impossible task at times. In keeping with the characteristic qualities of narrative, the boundaries between the participants' personal, social and academic lives tended to blur in their reconstruction of experiences. As the narratives unfolded, it was quite often impossible to dissect the personal from the social, the social from the academic. Even attempting to do so seems, in retrospect, quite anathema to the whole concept of narrative as a research methodology. Thus, the synopses, although structured loosely around their personal, social and academic lives, acted more as member checks than as rigorous thematic representations of their sharing from the first two interviews.

As well as acting as member checks, the synopses also provided stimuli for further discussion. Participants were asked to read their synopsis and comment as they wished. My prompt was, "Please talk to me as you read. Is there anything I have included that you believe is not really as I have represented it, or you like to add or change?" "Getting others straight, as they would have us get them, is not easy", Peshkin (2001) tells us (p. 245). I was, therefore, somewhat surprised that only one participant asked for one small section to be removed, although she agreed that it was indeed a faithful representation of her comment at the time. Her concern related more to potential responses to her representation of others than to herself. Significantly, this member checking process elicited lengthy discussion with many participants, some topics emerging that hadn't surfaced during the earlier interviews.

This third interview, then, provided an opportunity for an explicit overview of the entire interview sequence. Not only did it allow participants the opportunity to view the experience holistically – as one with a beginning, middle and ending – but it allowed them to, seemingly paradoxically, retain 'ownership' of the data generated, but also acknowledge the inherent co-constructed nature of the outcome. All these features are consonant with narrative inquiry as a research methodology.

Longitudinal, not cross-sectional

My decision to conduct a longitudinal re-entry study was, as exemplified in Chapter Two, primarily a result of the dearth of such an approach in previous studies. Those longitudinal studies which have been conducted – Chur-Hansen (2004), Citron (1996), Furukawa (1997), Martin, Bradford and Rohrlach (1995), Milstein (2005) and Rogers and Ward (1993) – investigate the temporal phase that spans *pre* to *post* sojourn. The one exception to this is Vidal et al.'s (2007) study which investigates sojourners' perceptions two and then nine

months after return. But Vidal et al.'s study still does not capture the re-entry experience synchronously – as it occurs. Vidal et al. (2007) rely solely on sojourners' recollections of their re-entry experiences. My study, by comparison, aims to explore, longitudinally, the re-entry experience in a synchronous manner. Given that Adler first identified in 1981 that readjustment to the home culture for most sojourners takes approximately six months, it is somewhat surprising to find such a dearth of studies that investigate experiences synchronously during those six months. My study is unique, therefore, in that it explores, concurrently, the re-entry experience of sojourners during the first six months in their home culture.

Peshkin (2001) claims that collecting cross-sectional data, or “a snapshot image”, as he describes it, “may mislead and falsify by the extreme narrowness of its representation” (p. 243). While I don't believe that cross-sectional data gathering of re-entry experiences necessarily misleads or falsifies, it does capture experience at one point in time only, and therefore seriously limits the possibilities of exploring re-entry as a process. Current consideration of re-entry as a process in the literature is primarily related to it being just one of the phases of the entire *pre*, *during* and *post* process; the focus is not on the process of re-entry itself. This study explores re-entry as a process by gathering data longitudinally. As Black (1992) suggests, “while most social science research can benefit from longitudinal research designs, the processional nature of [re-entry] adjustment makes this type of design even more appropriate” (p. 755).

Ethical Issues

Ethical issues in research have, importantly, now joined the venerable trilogy of ontology, epistemology and methodology, under the broad title of axiology (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Yet, Josselson (2007) points out that “the ethics of *narrative research* is in a state of evolution” (p. 538, emphasis added). This evolutionary state represents the convergence of traditional biomedical approaches with the relatively new approaches to human science research. Clandinin (2006) suggests that, as narrative inquirers, “we need to imagine ethics as being about negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices” (p. 52). Lieblich (interviewed in Clandinin & Murphy, 2007) identifies this as the “positive’ side” to ethical consideration in narrative inquiry – our empowerment of individuals through honouring and listening to their stories (p. 647). Yet, the “negative side” – the “do no harm” side – is equally important (p. 647).

My undergirding question of myself – in regard to ethics – throughout this study was, ‘Will the participants feel fairly treated?’ Thus, in my study, ethical considerations were reflective of *attitude* as well as *procedure*. In other words, there was both an “implicit contract” as well as an “explicit” one (Josselson, 2007, p. 539). I wanted to honour and respect them and their stories and I also needed to provide clear documentation about the procedures involved.

On first consideration, these dual ethical roles (respecting participants and their stories, and providing documentation) may seem juxtaposed – one implying closeness and subjectivity, the other distance and objectivity. For, as Peshkin (2001) suggests “respect discourages researcher distance, obliging us to get close, stay close, and be fully open to what we learn from others about ourselves and our topic” (p. 244). However, even the “explicit” contract – the initial contact and sharing of procedure – Lieblich (2006) identifies as “rich with meanings and promises” (p. 63). In other words, I was asking myself questions such as: How can I convince these participants that my purpose is valid and worthy? Undoubtedly, the participants were asking themselves similar questions: How do I know that this person will value my experiences? From these dyadic ethical considerations, then, two key areas of ethical complexity and tension emerged in my study: the relationship between me (as the researcher) and the participants (as the researched), and the subsequent representation of the findings. The discussion related to the ethics surrounding representation will be presented in the next chapter.

Relationship with participants

Relationship is central to any social science research; human inquiry is dependent on some form of interaction or connection between the inquirer and the focus of the inquiry. Indeed, Clandinin & Rosiek (2007) claim that narrative inquirers “cannot subtract themselves from relationship” (p. 69). It is integral to what they do. Yet, with this requisite relationship comes tension and complexity, particularly around ethical issues. This has prompted calls for researchers to apply the same reflexivity in regard to ethical issues that they would ordinarily apply to epistemological and methodological issues (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004; Kvale, 2006). As a result, the form that research relationships take, particularly in the context of narrative interviewing, is the subject of some debate in the research literature. Clearly, then, the relationship I developed with the participants in my study needed to be carefully thought through prior to undertaking the interviews; it was not something that could be left to chance.

Having said this, not all situations can be pre-thought. Josselson (2007) clarifies this by distinguishing between “best practices” (those involving considered decision-making) and “real practices” (those involving decisions made *in situ*) (p. 538). In my study, for example, I

had to make an ‘on the spot’ decision about how to handle a participant who, at the beginning of the first interview, burst into tears and proceeded to focus on the story of her long-term partner’s infidelity while she was overseas. I was reminded of Guillemin’s and Gillam’s (2004) similar situation where a participant, ostensibly being interviewed about heart disease, proceeded to disclose information about incest. Like Guillemin and Gillam (2004), I was faced with an “ethically important moment” (p. 261). ‘Do I keep recording?’, ‘Do I engage her in a discussion of this or steer the interview back on course?’ I chose to engage her. The decision had more to do with the ethical consequences for the participant of *not* engaging her, than my fear of engaging in unethical procedure. This clearly reflected my belief that my research ‘contract’ extended well beyond adding to the extant body of knowledge on the experience of re-entry; it involved respecting and protecting the integrity and dignity of my participants. Ellis and Berger (2003) tell us that “listen[ing] empathically, identify[ing] with participants, and show[ing] respect for participants’ emotionality” is a critical element in interactive interviewing (p. 469).

My first step in deciding how I would engage in ‘best practice’ was to consciously reflect on how I would position myself as the interviewer. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) juxtapose the research relationship continuum as *traditionalists* – those who believe that the relationship should have clear boundaries, be formal, distant and purposeful – and *revisionists* (feminists, for example) – those who believe that research relationships should be dynamic, fluid and reciprocal, and to be anything other than this is to be disrespectful and diminish the voice of the participant, ultimately potentially “undermin[ing] productive inquiry” (p. 137). My reading around narrative and interviewing affirmed my belief that the data gathering stage in my study would be more representative of Chase’s (2005) revisionist perspective and, while I was clearly not operating from a traditionalist perspective, I was cognisant of the importance of creating and respecting boundaries in my relationship with the participants.

Twenty six years of high school, undergraduate and postgraduate teaching experience had taught me about the importance of boundaries, of “balancing closeness and distance” (Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007, p. 178). I was the interviewer; they were the participant. I was a lecturer; they were students. We weren’t peers. Yet we did have a shared common experience and that is what brought us together. And although they had something I wanted – insights into re-entry experiences – I did not want our relationship to be one constructed around a “commodity metaphor”, where their stories became commodities and ultimately my property (Hoskins & Stoltz, 2005, p. 105).

Nor did I perceive our relationship as having “manipulative potential” (Kvale, 2006, p. 483). As an illustration of such manipulative potential, Kvale (2006), in an unapologetically critical stance, problematises the researcher/participant relationship using a *Little Red Riding Hood* analogy – where the researcher is the wolf masquerading behind a mask of friendliness, developing a false sense of trust with the participant as an efficient means of obtaining disclosure. I was convinced that, if I was to gather valid data, the relationship that developed in my study had to be built on genuine trust and respect, not a veneer of trust, as in *Little Red Riding Hood*. As Pitts and Miller-Day (2007) assert, “establishing a relationship built on trust is thus not only desirable, but also may be a necessary condition to ensure validity or trustworthiness in naturalistic research” (p. 178).

For me, this manifested itself in a deliberate conceptual shift in placing the focus in the interviews on the participant. This was not a challenging conceptual shift for me as I could see a distinct analogy with my student-centred teaching philosophy – where what the student does is considered far more significant than what the teacher does. In the research interviewing situation, I wanted this sense of trust to come from the participants recognising, from my behaviour, that they were the ‘centre of attention’, that what they wanted to say mattered more than what I had to say or wanted them to say. Chase (1995) suggests that a “successful” narrative interviewer is one who can shift responsibility from the interviewer to the participant, with the participant “willingly embrac[ing] this shift” (p. 274). Yet, this is not to suggest that what I said as the interviewer was not significant. The balance between listening and self-disclosing became a critical issue for me. Furthermore, there was no guarantee that the participants would always willingly embrace such a shift, despite my best efforts to encourage that. In this regard, the advice that Brookfield (1995) offers educators is equally relevant for researchers: “the sincerity of [our] intentions does not guarantee the purity of [our] practice” (p. 1). Social, political and psychological influences operating in the participants’ lives can affect the impact of a researcher’s planned strategy.

Defining roles

Mishler (1986) claims that rather than the “striking asymmetry of power” that characterises traditional interviewing, we should as researchers be striving for an approach that is “directed toward the empowerment of respondents” (p. 117). One way of conceiving this is, as Chase (2005) suggests, for the researcher to perceive the roles in a narrative interview relationship as that of *narrator* and *listener*. In essence, this meant me inviting and listening to participants’ stories. This conceptualisation provided a crucial guide for the development of my relationship with participants throughout the interviews. This represented the participant/narrators maintaining control of the interview process. Gubrium and Koro-

Ljungberg (2005) claim that these issues of ‘control’ and ‘roles’ are two “borders” that social constructionist interviewers must contend with (p. 689).

As evidence of the participants’ control of the interview process in my study, the interview transcripts reveal that the majority of the ‘talk space’ in the 18 interviews was indeed occupied by the participants. While Hendry (2007) claims that Western culture’s privileging of speaking means that we are left with “no epistemology of listening” (p. 494), I drew on my many years of experience in interpersonal communication, as both an educator and as a qualitative researcher engaged in interviewing. So, I actively listened, feeding back to participants summaries of their thoughts – content and feelings – making reference to some of their earlier comments and noting inconsistencies. Early in the interview sequence I wrote in my journal *“I’m grateful for my years of interviewing experience as a researcher and as a teacher – allowing gaps, not interrupting, understanding the importance of focussed, attentive listening and picking up on particular words...”* (22/03/06). I wanted to “listen [my participants] into speech” (Josselson, 2007, p. 547). Peshkin (2001) claims that we “display respect to our research others by taking seriously what they say...what they make of things” (p. 244). This was how I positioned myself as listener in an attempt to move the focus from the interviewer to the participant narrator, and to build a sense of trust and respect. The participants needed to feel heard and understood.

Interviewer self-disclosure

Yet, placing myself first and foremost in the role of listener did not preclude me from engaging in conversation with the participants. Thus, another significant decision I had to reach prior to undertaking the interviews, was the extent to which I ‘self-disclosed’ during the interviews. In other words, how much should I share of my own experience of re-entry while I was talking with participants? It seemed impossible to me, on first consideration, to not self-disclose when the motivation for this research arose from my own personal experience of re-entry. Much of that personal experience – and literature – informed me that returnees were hungry for an audience, for people who ‘really understood’. Surely, sharing my own experiences was one of the best ways to show participants that I really understood? Yet, the issue is somewhat more complex than a simple desire to help others feel heard.

Clearly, there is a strong belief that interviewer self-disclosure can facilitate the data gathering process. By this is meant that participants are more likely to open up and be forthcoming if the interviewer is prepared to show their own vulnerability by sharing similar experiences, attitudes or ideas (Narayan & George, 2003; Reinhartz & Chase, 2003). It is believed that interviewer self-disclosure will facilitate a connection between the interviewer and the participant (Josselson, 2007; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). In making

participants feel more comfortable, such sharing on the part of the interviewer can also “close the hierarchical gap” that often exists in traditional interviewing situations (Ellis & Berger, 2003, p. 469). Moreover, Harrison, MacGibbon and Morton (2001) claim that “judicious” self-disclosure can transform interviews into conversations and thus, yield “richer data” (p. 323). The issue of self-disclosure, then, relates as much to *how* it’s used, as it does to *if* and *why* and it’s used.

As I listened back to the interview recordings, there were, indeed, numerous instances where participants animatedly made comments in response to my self-disclosure. In one instance a participant slapped his thigh and exclaimed, ‘Yes, yes, that’s exactly what it was like!’ Typically, after such self-disclosure, discussion would flow more freely. It definitely felt like the common and shared experience that we had bridged a gap between us and made us feel more comfortable in each others’ presence and more at ease in sharing intimate details of experience. In some ways, some of my participants did feel more like “allies” (Witz, 2006, p. 248) than research subjects. With one participant, in particular, my self-disclosure played a critical role in “prompt[ing] reciprocal talk” (Abell, Locke, Condor, Gibson & Stevenson, 2006, p. 223). A somewhat reticent participant, my sharing of experiences consistently provided segues into her own experiences. None of this is to suggest, however, that my self-disclosure was always an objective, pre-planned procedure. It was, at times, simply a natural, genuine response to a conversation. Nor is it to suggest that my self-disclosure was continuous and over-bearing. It was, in comparison to the participants’ sharing, minimal. I had no intention, as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) warn, of “...obscur[ing] or overwhelm[ing] the inquiry” (p. 95) with my self-disclosure.

Yet, this notion of potential resonance and equity flowing from self-disclosure on the part of the interviewer, has been problematised by some. Reinharz and Chase (2003), for example, suggest that self-disclosure can sometimes indicate that the interviewer prefers speaking rather than listening. Abell et al. (2006), furthermore, suggest that interviewer self-disclosure has the potential to disenfranchise the participant if they perceive the interviewer as having “greater category entitlement” to talk about a topic (p. 235). In other words, if the participants perceive that the interviewer knows more about the topic under discussion than them, then participants can potentially see their role in the interview as redundant. Moreover, self-disclosure can serve to expose differences in age, social class, race, religion and education, further disenfranchising the participant (Abell et al., 2006), and further distancing the interviewer from the participants. I did not want my self-disclosure to prompt “a market exchange of intimacies” where the participant reveals a detail and the interviewer counters – “they show you a card, you show them one” (Sennett cited in Kvale, 2006, p. 493). It needed

to perform a function that kept the focus on the participant with me in the primary role of listener.

My ultimate decision in regard to self-disclosure is best encapsulated by Freeman (2007) in her discussion of the ideas of the hermeneutic philosopher, Gadamer: “what brings people together in dialogue and is a primary condition for understanding to occur is a shared interest; a sharing of the thing in question. Furthermore, there has to be a common language” (p. 938). I had both a shared interest and, given that my participants had already completed, or were close to completing, university degrees, a common register, or shared language. The participants could have been prepared to share, therefore, because they saw me as an ‘insider’ rather than an ‘outsider’ (Merton cited in Abell et al., 2006). I firmly believe that my own autobiographical experiences provided insights and understandings that facilitated the interview process, not hindered it.

Behar’s (1996) *The Vulnerable Observer*, read five years prior to undertaking my interviews, changed forever the way I perceived the inquirer’s role in social science research. I couldn’t, and didn’t, seek to be detached or objective. Thus, I self-disclosed. I empathised and made transparent my own vulnerabilities. I was playing a dual role – that of trained social scientist in a professionally responsible role, and that of human being genuinely interested and intimately involved in the lives of others (Josselson, 2007; Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007). I was balancing the two.

Concluding the relationship

One of the more difficult things I had to deal with – and no doubt the participants as well – was the suddenness of the ending of the relationship. I had not met any of the participants prior to the interviews and did not continue a relationship with them after the data gathering stage. Our relationship was built entirely around the three interviews. Patai (cited in Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007) captures this transient relationship dilemma well: “I continue to be uncomfortable with the appearance of friendship and intimacy that the personal interview situation generates and even temporarily creates, in view of the extraordinary distance that, thereafter, is inevitable” (p. 178). This concern was echoed in my journal.

First of the third round of interviews with X today. Funny, I had mixed feelings – excitement about the progress of my PhD (nearly there with data collection) tinged with a little sadness that this temporary, brief, yet also very personal relationship with this person is about to close. It

strikes me that it mirrors the overseas experience in some ways – sudden and complete cut-off point to relationships when leaving the host culture. (05/06/06)

My way of maintaining a sense of connection with these participants was to present each of them with a comprehensive atlas at the conclusion of the final interview. I suspected that, as university students, they would be unlikely to already own such a valuable item. But, more importantly, it symbolised our shared interest in the world and its cultures. It was not given, nor to my belief was it received (based on participants' responses) as 'payment'.

Some time after having completed the interviews, I was challenged by a suggestion in the literature that I might have, as a researcher, taken advantage of the participants in my study. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2005), for example, writes of ethnographic research as "an act of intervention" where, as researchers, "we enter people's lives, build relationships, engage in discourse, make an imprint...and leave" (p. 12). More confronting to me at the time was Clough's (2004) claim that "we steal in the name of research" – "conscious theft of glimpses of peoples' lives in the interests of research" (p. 376). Two instances of communication with participants after the final interview helped ease my sense of discomfort over this dilemma.

First, one of the participants sent me a card with the following words inscribed: *What started out as something designed to help you, ended up helping me. Thank you.* Second, eighteen months after the final interview, I bumped into one of the participants in a park in another city. As we chatted and he shared his plans for further travel, he commented that he didn't know how he would have coped with his re-entry transition had he not had me to talk with. I am aware that the literature warns of the danger for researchers of transgressing into 'counselling' or 'psychotherapy' modes (see, for example, Ellis & Berger, 2003, p. 470), yet, Orbach (1997) also reminds us that "evidence suggests that the interaction/social process of confiding accounts to others has positive consequences for individuals' psychological and physical well-being" (p. 460). I didn't attempt to counsel or psychoanalyse my participants; at no time did I 'advise' or pass judgement on their thoughts, feelings or behaviours. These two participants' comments were representative of something far more significant than simply having someone to listen; it was having someone to listen who *had a common, shared experience* and who, therefore, really understood.

One further serendipitous meeting with a participant at a concert two years after the interviews had been conducted, highlighted to me the "inherently relational" nature of the narrative analysis process, even when the participants are not involved in that process

(Hoskins & Stoltz, 2005, p. 96). I had, just prior to seeing this participant again, completed the writing of his narrative chapter. When I spoke with him at the concert it seemed as though I had been in an on-going relationship with him, having read his words over and over, and thought about and pondered the meaning of his life experiences in intricate and iterative detail through his transcripts. His thoughts and words had been painting materials for the last month. Yet, to him, it must have seemed like reconnecting with a virtual stranger. I felt strangely destabilised by this meeting. I reflected on the reason for this for some time. A rational, rather than emotional, reason for my discomfort seemed elusive, but I imagined it had to do with our incompatible perspectives on the conclusion to the research relationship. For the participants, the relationship had ended; for me, it had continued, albeit asymmetrically.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the methodological decision-making in this project from its inception through to the analysis stage. It has provided both theoretical and conceptual background as well as insight into the pragmatics and ethics surrounding research design, recruitment and data gathering.

The next chapter considers the vexed nature of analysis – and subsequently representation – in narrative studies. It outlines and justifies the specific approach taken in this study.

Ways of Telling Methodology (2)

The gap between engaging others where they are and representing them where they aren't, always immense but not much noticed, has suddenly become extremely visible. What once seemed only technically difficult, getting 'their' lives into 'our' works, has turned morally, politically, even epistemologically, delicate. (Geertz, 1988, p. 130)

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to make explicit both the *process* of narrative analysis undertaken and the *structure* employed in the reporting of this study. While ostensibly a straightforward purpose, the circuitous nature of my analysis process made linear description of it – a style essentially determined by this dissertation structure – a complex task. How do you describe in a logical, linear, clear fashion the method of analysis employed in narrative inquiry which, by its very nature, is non-linear? Diamond and Mullen (1999) liken such a circuitous process to *palimpsest*. Over and under. Layered. As a result of this relative incongruence between design and reporting, there is a degree of cross-referencing within and between certain sections in this chapter.

The chapter begins with a justification of, and the challenges inherent in, undertaking analysis in narrative inquiry studies. This is followed by a detailed description and justification of both the specific analysis process undertaken, and the specific structure employed in the reporting of this study. Representing the participants emerges as a key point of discussion in this section for, as Geertz (1988) asserts in the opening to this chapter, getting others into our works is now a “visible” as well as “delicate” process (p. 130). Next, the vexed nature of validity in narrative inquiry is considered. The chapter concludes with a brief guide to reading the narratives.

Why analyse?

One of the most contentious issues in the field of narrative inquiry relates to the analysis (or interpretation) of narratives. In other words, there is a dilemma over whether narratives ought

to be analysed or ought to stand alone. Barone (2007) suggests that some people consider any form of analysis “narrative abduction” (p. 457). Hendry (2007), for example, considers interpretation “an act of colonisation” (p. 494). She views narrative sharing as “a spiritual act”, one that is often hijacked in interpretation where what the interpreter wants to say takes precedence over listening to what has actually been said (p. 496).

On the other hand, others, such as Riesmann (1993), claim that narratives “require interpretation” (p. 22). She reflects: “nature and the world do not tell stories, individuals do. Interpretation is inevitable because narratives are representations...” (p. 2). Likewise, Atkinson and Delamont (2005) assert that we shouldn’t just collect and document narratives because we believe them to have a special or privileged quality. Rather, we should “be studying narrative insofar as it is a particular feature of a given cultural milieu” (p. 824). Tierney (2002), too, warns of the danger of “unreflexive over-reliance on narrative autobiography where understanding the Other is subsumed by narrative catharsis” (p. 393). Hoskins and Stoltz (2005) assert that sense-making or interpretation “is the foundation of narrative research” (p. 97). From the disparate perspectives presented above, it is clear that analysis, as an integral part of the narrative inquiry approach, is not universally accepted.

‘Ownership’ of data and representation emerge as specific areas of contention in the narrative analysis debate. As researchers exploring human experience, we often live with the “fear of offending” our participants, particularly at the analysis and subsequent representation stage; this is a situation that is especially “problematic when dealing with small sample sizes in narrative research” (Hoskins & Stoltz, 2005, p. 95). The real point of tension seems to be, as Hoskins and Stoltz highlight, in the balance between respecting participants’ knowledge and expertise, and drawing upon our own body of academic knowledge and ability – and in my opinion, *responsibility* – as researchers to analyse and interpret.

Adopting a position in the narrative analysis debate can be a vexed process as a number of complex issues need to be considered. One of the most important considerations for me related to the purpose of my research and, by implication, the status of my participants. For example, a study which attempted to give voice to a group of marginalised, disenfranchised members of the community, could be seriously compromised – ethically, at the very least – by a ‘heavy-handed’ interpretation of their shared narratives. Yet, the participants in my study were not from a disenfranchised, marginalised, voiceless group in the community. They were, in fact, a privileged group – tertiary overseas exchange students. I was not conducting critical research with an aim of improving the plight of marginalised individuals. My research purpose was more related to exploring their individual experiences of the *phenomenon* they

experienced, than to giving them, as individuals, a public voice free from omniscient authorial interpretation. This is not to suggest that divorcing *what* is said from *how* it's said, and what that *means*, was an easy or even desirable approach for me as a narrative inquirer; it was simply not my intention to privilege process over content. From this perspective, my initial inclination was certainly *towards* analysing their narratives.

Furthermore, I believe that the telling *and* interpreting of an experience offers readers more than just a vicarious experience. It also adds *insight* into that vicarious experience. It was my intention to “deepen the reader’s understanding of the meaning conveyed” in the narratives through my analysis (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 483).

Another consideration in my decision-making regarding analysis of the narratives related to my epistemological beliefs. From my earlier discussion, it is eminently clear that I believe that knowledge is a social construction, built on the foundations of experience. Sense-making of that experience happens collectively, through interaction with others. Thus, experience and sense-making of that experience are inherently social acts, deeply immersed in a social, political and historical milieu. From this perspective, shared meaning of experiences – through narrative – relates to more than just the individual; it relates to the broader social frame of which individuals are a part. Narrative understanding does not exist separately from the wider social world. Thus, I did not view the participants’ stories as being just about them individually. I was, through my narratives, attempting to “simultaneously represent commonality and uniqueness” (Butt et al. cited in Hatch & Wisniewski, 1995, p. 128). I firmly believe that narrative, as Hatch and Wisniewski (1995) argue, provides us with the opportunity of “connecting the lives and stories of individuals to the understandings of larger human and social phenomena” (p. 113). This capacity is, according to Chase (1995), a “major contribution of narrative analysis” (p. 274).

The most profound influence on my thinking in this regard was from Mills (1959). His words epitomised my philosophical reasoning in deciding to analyse the narratives.

Know that many personal troubles cannot be solved merely as troubles, but must be understood in terms of public issues – and in terms of the problems of history-making. Know that the human meaning of public issues must be revealed by relating them to personal troubles – and to the problems of the individual life. Know that the problems of social science, when adequately formulated,

must include both troubles and issues, both biography and history, and the range of their intricate relations. (p. 226)

As a researcher, I felt that my responsibility to my audience was more than just telling stories. As Clandinin (2006) suggests, “we must be able to answer the ‘so what’ and ‘who cares’ questions that all researchers need to answer in their work” (p. 52). I agree with Ely (2007) that “narrative researchers must communicate binding ideas and insights about what it all meant to them, what they learned, and what this might mean to others” (p. 595). I would, as Mills (above) encourages us, join biography and history in order to illuminate our understanding of the human condition. That I would analyse my participants’ narratives was firmly decided.

Having established that I would, and justified *why* I would, analyse the participants’ narratives, the next step in my methodological journey involved deciding first, how I would approach the process of analysis and second, how I would structure and present the results of that analysis in the reporting of my study.

The process of analysis

Broad frameworks

While discussion pertaining to the advantages and disadvantages of the practice of analysing narrative data abounds in the literature, comparatively little exists in terms of exemplars. There are few studies that explicitly outline the process of analysis undertaken – there is, as Lieblich tells us, “no cookbook” (interviewed in Clandinin & Murphy, 2007, p. 643). This is not to suggest that exemplars *don’t* exist – Lieblich (2006), McCormack (2004) and Ollerenshaw and Creswell (2002), for example, are all models of approaches to narrative analysis. But the approach taken in each instance is a very personal one and seems to me to be one based on an intricate mix of ingredients, including, but not confined to, research purpose, participant identity, researcher identity, philosophical positioning and ethical considerations. This is not something peculiar just to narrative. Hatch (2002) describes all qualitative data analysis as “complex and idiosyncratic” (p. 147). As a narrative researcher, then, I felt in a double-bind of having ‘freedom’ to create my own unique or eclectic approach to analysis, while experiencing some anxiety about that lack of definite structure. I could relate well to Somerset Maugham’s purported advice about writing: “There are three rules for writing the novel. Unfortunately, no-one knows what they are.” This is not to suggest, however, that narrative analysis is without broad existing frames.

Polkinghorne (1995) outlines two possible approaches to analysing narratives. The first he refers to as *analysis of narratives* which basically parallels Bruner's (1986) paradigmatic mode of cognition. In this form of narrative inquiry stories are collected and analysed, and common themes and concepts across all the narratives are identified. The undergirding methodological purpose of the *analysis of narratives* approach, then, is generalisation.

The second approach Polkinghorne refers to as *narrative analysis* which is essentially a form of narrative construction where data are collected and moulded, by means of a plot, into a story form (1995). Because it is more an act of "textual arrangement" than of analysis, Barone (2007, p. 456) prefers to refer to this approach as *narrative construction*. The undergirding methodological purpose of the *narrative construction* approach is particularisation.

While I employed a paradigmatic analysis approach reminiscent of Polkinghorne's (1995) *analysis of narratives* in the identification of themes for each participant, it is important to point out that this occurred *within* each participant's narrative, not *across* participants' narratives. This is an approach distinctive to the interpretive process in interview-based narrative research (Chase, 2005). It was not my intention to draw generalisations. This is how my approach differed from Polkinghorne's. My approach to analysis was inductive, not deductive; themes were drawn *from* the data, not *applied to* them. In the actual reporting of the narratives, I adopted a *narrative analysis* approach (employing Polkinghorne's term), or *narrative construction* approach (employing Barone's term). Both these broad frameworks guided the specific approach adopted in this study.

Specific approach

The term 'analysis', as used in this study, is an all-encompassing one, and refers to far more than the final and most explicit representation of the process of analysis – in this study, a meta-analysis section titled *Making meaning* at the end of each narrative chapter. Analysis occurs at all stages of interaction with the data. Lieblich (2006) reflects that even the process of ordering data chronologically is a kind of analysis. Similarly, sorting data into "interesting", "irrelevant" is also a form of analysis (p. 66). In recognition of this fact, the section that follows on the specific approach taken to analysis is comprehensive as it attends to all aspects of the analysis process.

Working with the transcripts

My approach to working with the transcripts resonates with the work of Tesch (1990). My first step in the analysis process was to fully transcribe the three sets of interviews for each participant. This transcription began once all 18 interviews had been completed: I did not transcribe at the same time as conducting interviews. This segregated approach was partially enforced (the interviews were conducted in an intense time frame which severely limited time for transcription), and partially planned – separation of time and space would contribute to a more reflective interpretation. The transcriptions were not ‘sanitised’; they were recorded word-for-word, with emotional responses, pauses, stutters and so on, included. I believed that this approach to transcription maintained the depth and richness of the data and ultimately contributed to a more valid interpretation of the transcripts.

My second step was to listen again to each participant’s three recorded interviews while following and reading the printed transcripts. This allowed me to do two things: first, to further familiarise myself with the data, especially the paralinguistic aspects, and second, to verify accuracy of transcription. By this stage I had listened to the first two interviews for each participant four times – once during the original interview, once during the formulation of the synopses, once during transcription and once during the ‘verification’ stage. I had listened to the third interview for each participant three times – once during the original interview, once during transcription and once during the ‘verification’ stage. From this point on, my engagement was solely with *printed* transcripts and the analysis revolved around one participant a time.

Surprisingly, the decision about the order in which to consider each participant was a perplexing one. Did I, for example, select the participants with the most complex experiences first, when I felt ‘fresh’ and potentially at my most creative, or did I leave them till last when I felt more confident and experienced in my analysis technique? My final decision was to compromise: to consider the participants with the most complex experiences mid-way through the analysis process. Furthermore, given that two of the participants attended the same overseas university, I deliberately separated their analysis in time. One was considered early in the analysis process, one late. This allowed me to see each of their experiences as idiosyncratically as possible.

Next, I re-read the transcripts, specifically segmenting the data into relevant and meaningful units – “an organizing system” derived from the data itself (Tesch, 1990, p. 96). This segmented data stage I referred to as searching for ‘themes’. As mentioned earlier, this was an inductive process. I made notes about these emerging themes in the margins of the

transcripts. Some of these themes were at a micro level (for example, ‘relationship with room mate’), others were at a more macro level (for example, ‘changed world perspective’). As previously mentioned, narrative researchers look for themes *within* each participant’s story, rather than *across* participants’ stories. This is what distinguishes narrative analysis from more traditional analysis and maintains the focus on individual experience rather than generalising from a number of experiences. There are, however, numerous cross-references to other participants within each of the narrative chapters. This was considered a way of capturing shared and common experiences and, therefore, contributing to the overall understanding of the phenomenon of re-entry. It is important to underscore the fact that common experience does not equate with generalisation.

It could be suggested that identifying themes as part of the analysis process is contradictory with maintaining a holistic, non-fragmented perspective, something I have hitherto promoted as not as only desirable, but necessary for exploring aspects of human experience. However, as Peshkin (2001) points out, “in any form of qualitative research, inseparability is inescapable: things are connected. We wrench them from their contexts knowing that we do a disservice to their natural interrelatedness; we must do this if we are not to be paralysed by the immense complexity of the world of social phenomena” (p. 247). In a similar vein, Hoskins and Stoltz (2005) refer to a “world of ‘too muchness’” and “an over-abundance of perspectives”, which can render the meaning-making process “overwhelming” (p. 98).

In order to avoid an ‘overwhelming’ sense of ‘too muchness’ in my analysis process, I sought to identify themes from the participants’ transcripts. Somehow, the data had to be made accessible and meaningful to the reader; thematic representation seemed to me to be the best way of making that possible. I believe this paradigmatic analytic stage value-added to the final reporting of data, making a plethora of potentially non-linear discussions, more accessible for the reader. People do not tell stories and narrate their lives in a linear fashion – in neat, tidy sequences; they move back and forth, revisiting, reframing, adding and altering. This is part of the sense-making process. A dissertation has an audience; the narrative chapters needed to be framed in such a way that readers could make sense from them.

After this, these disparate themes were subjected to two ‘sorting’ processes. The first was to divide the themes between ‘context’ (that is, those themes relevant to their experiences prior to re-entry, such as previous travels, the most recent exchange site and so on) and ‘re-entry’ (that is, those themes relevant specifically to their experiences since being home). As already discussed in the previous chapter, although the focus of this study is on re-entry, it is not possible to divorce that experience from its context and its history; re-entry is just one part of

an entwined process. Understanding the overseas experience, then, assists in an understanding of the re-entry experience. For this reason, there is a substantial ‘context’ section (titled *Being in country X*) in each narrative chapter.

The second sorting process was to look for meta-themes from the combined original micro and macro level themes discerned through the reading of the transcripts. These meta-themes were designed to capture both the essence and, paradoxically, the complexity of the overseas and the re-entry experiences. They were themes that traversed and connected individual stories. Thus, for example, in the ‘re-entry’ section (titled *Being home*) there were between two and five meta-themes for each participant. Such themes included: ‘Living in suspension’, ‘Loss of common ground’ and ‘Staying motivated’. Some of these theme titles were literal, some metaphoric and some verbatim comments from participants. Regardless of the nature of the titles, each was designed to capture a unique aspect, as well as the complexity, of that person’s experience. These meta-themes formed the internal structure of both the ‘context’ and ‘re-entry’ sections of each narrative chapter.

The narrative construction

The next and most complex stage of the analysis process was the narrative construction – the “textual arrangement” (Barone, 2007, p. 456). This stage represented a ‘re-building’ after the ‘pulling apart’ rendered by the thematic analysis. One of the earliest decisions I made in terms of the narrative construction was to divide each narrative chapter into two sections, one section which contained the narrative, or stories, of both the overseas and re-entry experiences (titled, *Being in country X* and *Being home*, respectively), and one section which housed my meta-analysis (titled *Making meaning*) – a more objective, ‘distanced’ discussion of the meaning I drew from each participant’s narrative.

This separation was a deliberate one, designed to allow the participants’ stories in the narrative section of the chapter to ‘flow’, relatively uninterrupted, free from explicit analysis. I wanted to leave some ‘white space’ for readers. In doing so, I was essentially creating a text that developed what Tierney (1999) refers to as “conditions of agency” – my own, the participants’ and the readers’ (p. 311). As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) assert, a well written narrative text “offers readers a place to imagine their own uses and applications” (p. 42). I wanted readers to be able to “read their own stories between the lines” (Renner, 2001, p. 3), a capacity that Polkinghorne (1988) identifies as a key function of narrative research, and an attribute that distinguishes it, in Barthes’s (1973/1990) terms, as a “writerly text” rather than a “readerly text” (p. 142). In other words, it is constructed so that readers play an

active role in engaging with the text rather than being passive consumers of the text. For the reader this is not always an ‘easy’ experience, as the inherent ambiguities and gaps that characterise narrative often challenge and provoke.

As earlier discussed, this is not to suggest that the narrative sections of each chapter are devoid of any form of analysis; my synchronous comments and thoughts, recorded in the narrative sections of each chapter, are woven through the participants’ comments, representing both the co-constructed nature of the interviews and my meaning-making *in situ*. While the focus in the narrative constructions is most definitely on the participants themselves – their stories, thoughts, feelings, responses – and they are the narrators of their own experiences, *my* words – my thoughts, feelings and responses to each participant’s story – position me as a co-narrator. As co-narrator, my words also provide segues between each story in each participant’s narrative, thus helping to maintain the “aesthetic whole” of the text (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 241).

In the broadest sense, the narrative sections of each chapter needed to be constructed as all Western narratives are structured – with a beginning, middle and end. This was achieved by framing each of the narrative sections around the entire interview process. Thus, each narrative chapter begins with my first meeting of the participant. The body of each narrative encompasses the emerging stories – thematically organised – from the overseas and re-entry experiences shared throughout the three interviews. The narrative section of the chapter ends with the conclusion of the research relationship after the third and final interview. The meta-analysis (*Making meaning*) follows this narrative section and concludes each chapter.

Having established the overall structure of each narrative chapter the next step involved decision-making around *what* data to include and *how* to include that data under each of the thematic headings in the narrative sections. It is, as Lincoln (1997) contends, “a realist pretense” to think we can tell the “whole story” (p. 38). Thus, I made choices about what stories to include and what to exclude. Mishler maintains that one of the issues that narrative inquirers must address is being explicit about the process employed in selecting particular stories from the complete body of data (interviewed in Clandinin & Murphy, 2007). My selections were made on the basis of each story’s relevance to my meta-analysis section (*Making meaning*) that followed the narrative.

Given that my underlying purpose was to first explore and then portray individual experience of re-entry, it seemed apposite to structure the meta-analysis around themes that characterised the uniqueness of individuals’ experience. This rendered the process of selection of particular

stories from the data set a relatively logical and straightforward one; I selected stories for both the ‘context’ section and the ‘re-entry’ section that were related to the themes I explored in the meta-analysis. Yet, this wasn’t a linear process; the narrative sections of each chapter underwent at least two iterations: a first iteration which encapsulated *all* the themes that emerged from the interview transcripts, and a second which refined those themes and the specific content within them, after the meta-analysis had been written. Just as with the students’ story telling, this analysis process was one of back and forth.

Another significant decision in the narrative construction stage related to chronology. One of the unique aspects of my study was that it explored the re-entry process longitudinally – that is, participants’ experiences over a period of six months. This determined that my analysis structure must somehow differentiate between times within those six months. I decided to follow the temporal structure provided by the interviews – that is, after one to two months home, then three to four months, then five to six months. In the reporting of the study, however, I employed the generic temporal stages of *after two*, *after four* and *after six* months home and applied them to all six participants, regardless of whether their interviews fell outside these time periods – two months, four months and five months, for example. This consistency in approach was considered important for reader accessibility. I did not believe that it altered the validity of the data as the focus on the *process* of re-entry was retained.

As well as maintaining a focus on the *process* of re-entry, the temporal differentiation in the narrative section of each participant’s chapter also fulfilled another important function in this narrative inquiry study: it represented participants’ descriptions of changes through time, in story form. This is what distinguishes narrative inquiry from other forms of qualitative research that merely use narrative as data (Polkinghorne interviewed in Clandinin & Murphy, 2007).

An interesting point of discussion with my doctoral supervisors revolved around the prominence of either the temporal or the thematic aspects of each narrative chapter. In other words, did I allow the *temporal* aspect to dominate the structure of each ‘re-entry’ section of each narrative chapter and consider each identified theme under the framework imposed by those temporal stages, or did I allow the *thematic* aspect to dominate the structure and consider the participants’ experience of each theme at two, four and six months? While we could all see distinct advantages and disadvantages of both approaches (for example, a temporal structure maintains a focus on the *process*, but trades continuity in story form in doing so), I was convinced that the thematic structure was the most appropriate for my study – for one key reason.

While exploring the re-entry process, longitudinally, was an overarching aim of my study, I was wed ontologically, epistemologically and methodologically to narrative inquiry as an approach – something explored and justified in considerable detail in the previous chapter. While at no stage did I allow my method to dictate my research problem, I did believe that representing the results of my study in a form most congruent with a narrative inquiry approach should take precedence. This is because stories, unfolding over time, are the essence of narrative. I believed, therefore, that *story* should frame the structure, not time. Thus, each narrative chapter is structured thematically. This is not to suggest that the temporal aspect was insignificant; it simply became a second-order consideration rather than a first-order one in the structuring and representation of my participants' experiences. I wanted to retain the continuity of each story by following them through from beginning to end, uninterrupted.

The final stage in the narrative construction involved refining the content for each story shared for each theme in each temporal period. In essence, the participants' stories and words were my data. Just as in more traditional forms of data analysis, it became a process of sifting, sorting and refining the data to make it manageable and accessible for the reader – only I was sifting, sorting and refining *stories*, not quantifiable data. Some stories were reproduced, unmediated; some stories were abbreviated; and some were summarised by me in my role as co-narrator. I wanted to avoid, as Hoskins and Stoltz (2005) warn, a “proliferation of verbatim accounts” that left the reader “awash in content” and ultimately “at a loss for how to make meaning of the research” (p. 99). There were, for example, numerous comments by participants throughout the interviews that were peripheral to the key stories or repetitive. It was a straightforward step to eliminate such aspects. Even though there was choice involved in this process, it still involved verity and probity; a narrative researcher has no more licence to knowingly alter the meaning of data than a traditional researcher does. Thus, the ultimate outcome of this sorting, sifting and refining of data was a narrative construction – or textual arrangement – that was essentially a *pastiche*. It was a personal narrative – a collection of stories representing a significant moment in an individual's life, gleaned and crafted from monologues and fragments shared over a series of three interviews, woven together within thematic and temporal frames.

The meta-analysis

Earlier in this chapter I *justified* why I believed that narrative inquirers should analyse their data. This section will *describe* the process undertaken in the meta-analysis – the final section in each participant’s narrative chapter.

It was not my intention to present the meta-analysis as an authoritative, definite analysis of each participant’s experience. My intent was always to present the meta-analysis as *my* meaning-making, *my* reading of the data. I saw my process of analyzing the narratives, then, as “trafficking in human possibilities rather than in settled certainties” (Bruner, 1986, p. 26).

Hermeneutics – the study of interpretation of texts – informed my analysis. Many aspects of my analysis process were based on Kvale’s (1996) “hermeneutical canons of interpretation”, all of which are drawn from Radinzy’s original analysis of 1970 (pp. 48-50). Those canons which specifically informed my analysis process were: a continuous back and forth process between the parts and the whole, where each iteration leads to a deepened understanding of meaning; inner unity free from logical contradiction; autonomy of the text, where the text itself provides its own frame of reference and interpretation remains focussed on the *content*; extensive knowledge of the theme explored in the text; reflexivity, reflecting an inherent understanding of the subjectivity of any interpretation; and extending and enriching the understanding of the text. All of these ‘canons’ were revisited at various stages of the analysis process to ensure consistency in approach and congruence with the undergirding principles of hermeneutics.

Interpretation is closely aligned with meaning in qualitative analysis of data. Hatch (2002) suggests that, whilst interpretation is a defining characteristic of all qualitative research, it “fits most comfortably within the assumptions of the constructivist paradigm because its purpose is to help give meaning to, and make sense of, data” (p. 189). The participants’ meaning-making of their experiences emerged through their re-telling and sharing in the interviews – through discussion with me. Josselson and Lieblich (1995) remind us that this is one of the features of narrative – the participants are “interpreting themselves” (p. ix). *My* meaning-making occurred, in the first instance, during the interviews, and again, more reflectively, through the meta-analysis.

My first step in my meaning-making in the meta-analysis process was to read over the narratives I had crafted for each participant. As I was reading, I asked myself, “What is it that characterises this person’s experience?” I was seeking the particular, the idiosyncratic. I had assumed that this would be a complex and difficult stage, with my attempted meta-analysis

constantly being influenced by the boundaries already established by the themes. Yet, this proved to be one of the most enlightening stages. Framed within the original question of, “What characterises this participant’s experience?”, overarching themes were easily discernible. Themes such as ‘paradox’ and ‘marginalisation’ emerged. Moreover, although I was acutely aware of the symbiotic relationship between the overseas experience and the re-entry experience, gleaned from my own reading and from my interviews with the participants, it wasn’t until I reached this stage in the analysis that the *strength* of that relationship became apparent. It became immediately apparent that one key section of my meta-analysis needed to consider how each participant’s prior experience had impacted on their re-entry. Thus, the meta-analysis section in each narrative chapter contains two parts: *How prior experience affected the re-entry* and *Themes emerging from the narrative*. This process of meta-analysis underscored the inherently individualised nature of each person’s experience. Within the meta-analysis, links are made with re-entry literature, highlighting the similarities and differences between my participants’ experiences and those already recorded in literature.

Reviewing

Reviewing both the narrative constructions and the meta-analysis was the final stage of my comprehensive analysis process. Part of this review process essentially represented a cross-check of the ‘raw data’. I re-read each participant’s interview transcripts with two specific purposes. First, I wanted to help ensure that participants’ original thoughts and ideas hadn’t been misconstrued or misrepresented in the iterative process of constructing the narratives, for, as Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) observe, there are various iterations of interpretation that occur during the collection of stories during interview and the reporting of that data. During data collection, they contend, stories are *reconstructed* as narrators share their experiences. These stories are *co-constructed* as the interviewer listens and the narrator tells. Finally, in the reporting phase the stories are, yet again, *re-constructed* by the researcher. They claim, therefore, that we should be “ever mindful of the intentions of the original storyteller” (p. 118). My intention in this first part of the review process was to be mindful of my *perception* of my participants’ intentions; we can never fully know our participants’ intentions.

The second purpose in reviewing the transcripts was to identify any significant comments that had been overlooked in the earlier stages of selection of data. Without exception, for each participant, this process revealed at least one significant piece of data that had been overlooked or dismissed as insignificant at the time of initial reading, and had since been re-constructed as significant – primarily since the meta-analysis. This underscores, once again, the

notion of qualitative research being a circular process, or as Ely (1991) describes, a series of circles within circles. Furthermore, it is a salutary reminder of the inherent subjectivity of the research process, that “selection and construal always occur” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 89). The interpretive frame I had used to make sense of the data accounted, therefore, for both my perceptiveness and my blindness (van Manen, 1999).

The next part of the review process related to Lawrence-Lightfoot’s and Davis’s (1997) notion of the “aesthetic whole” of a text (p. 241). I adopted a strategy they described as Aristotlean – that is, considering the final text as a structural union of parts, any one of which, if removed, or displaced, would disturb the unity of the whole text. It was a simple, yet effective measure of the relevance, in terms of both import and positioning, of any of the participants’ stories. This step also had direct resonance with the hermeneutic canons discussed earlier.

The final step in the review process was to devise a one word title for each narrative chapter that encapsulated the process of re-entry for each individual. This step virtually represented a meta-meta-analysis and, as well as accentuating the highly individualised nature of each person’s re-entry experience, provided an overarching, holistic framework within which readers could make sense of each participant’s re-entry experience.

Representing the participants

As a narrative researcher, I knew there was no longer a belief that, in exploring and reporting on human experience, I could “tell it like it is” (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 2). First, people’s accounts are always partial, situated and tentative. Thus, although undoubtedly rich in meaning, no narrative can ever be “a complete reflection of the teller’s life” (Lieblich, 2006, p. 64). Any narration, Bruner (1986) tells us, is “a search for meanings among a spectrum of possible meanings” (p. 25). Second, participants craft and re-craft their identities through storytelling (Barone, 2001). Cortazzi’s (1993) concept of “multiple selves” is pertinent here as it is a salutary reminder to researchers that multiple versions of self exist simultaneously in any narrative telling. Thus, there is “the self then, the self now recalling then, the self now interpreting the self from the present self’s perspective, the self now thinking of possible future selves, a possible future self looking back now to the present self seeing it as in the past” (p. 13). As Lincoln (1997) contends, the self is not a prepackaged item that “can be taken off the shelf” (p. 40). A third reason why I couldn’t ‘tell it like it is’, is that there will always be gaps between reality, experience, and expressions (E. Bruner, 1986).

E. Bruner (1986) highlights the distinction between reality, experience and expression as particularly significant for researchers studying and reporting on human experience.

The critical distinction here is between reality (what is really out there, whatever that may be), experience (how that reality presents itself to consciousness), and expressions (how individual experience is framed and articulated). In a life history...the distinction is between life as lived (reality), life as experienced (experience), and life as told (expression)...we recognise in everyday life the gap between experience and its symbolic manifestation in expression. (p. 6)

As a narrative inquirer I had access only to my participants' lives as *told*; I did not have direct access to their experience. Furthermore, I was attempting to re-construct through writing, their particular life story as told to me. In this regard, Ellis and Bochner (1996) point out that "written reality is a second-order reality that reshapes the events it depicts" (p. 26). Every telling, then, is interpretive. In writing about my participants' experience I was, as Burroway suggests, "cast[ing] it in a new form" and in doing so, "discover[ing] and reveal[ing] new insights" (cited in Caulley, 2008, p. 447). This was congruent with not only the core relationship between meaning and narrative, but also the capacity of narrative to illuminate issues relevant to the wider social milieu.

One of the greatest challenges I faced in the analysis and reporting of this study was ensuring that I had been fair to my participants in my representations of them. Being 'fair' in our representation of research participants is a complex responsibility. Being both "truthful" and "considerate" is, Lieblich (2006) suggests, "an extremely difficult task" (p. 67). It is also, according to Atkinson and Delamont (2005), a process that all scholars recognise as being "not innocent" (p. 834).

As narrative inquirers reporting our findings, we are, Denzin claims, "deeply implicated" in our writing (Ellis, Bochner, Denzin, Lincoln, Morse, Pelias & Richardson, 2008, p. 268). As Bochner (2001) contends, "the process of theorizing, analyzing, and categorizing personal narratives is shot through and through with the imagination and ways of seeing of the interpreter" (p. 136). In a similar vein, Richardson (1992) warns of the dangers of deceiving ourselves into believing that we are being truly representative of participants in our reports,

because, “no matter how we stage the text, we – the authors – are doing the staging” (p. 131). There was no way that I could remove the ‘me’ from the analysis. I could, however, balance this with consideration of the participants’ perspectives. Hoskins and Stoltz (2005) purport this to be an essential step for narrative researchers undertaking analysis – that is, being able to employ an analytic perspective while, simultaneously, “remaining empathically attuned” to the participants’ interpretation of their own experiences (p. 99). This was something I experienced directly during the ‘review’ stage of my analysis process – as discussed earlier.

The first way I considered my participants’ perspectives in my representations of them was to retain their anonymity. I allocated each of them, and all passive participants – that is, relatives, friends and acquaintances to whom references are made within the narratives – a pseudonym. In places, gender was transposed and other identifying characteristics altered in order to protect these passive participants. Real place names in overseas settings were retained in order to contribute to the authenticity and validity of the participants’ experiences, but home culture place names were changed – although defining characteristics of those places were not – once again, as a way of helping to ensure anonymity.

Another way I considered the participants’ perspectives in my representation of them was to emulate Lieblich’s (2006) strategy of re-reading the final narrative constructions from the imagined perspective of my participants. Asking myself questions such as, ‘Would X feel upset by this inclusion?’, ‘Would X think I had exaggerated her response to this?’ helped in this re-reading process. I made a number of minor alterations to the narratives as a result of this process.

The final way I considered my participants’ perspectives in my representation of them was in relation to language. Although my participants were well educated, articulate individuals, I reflected on the salutary reminder offered by Nespor and Barber (1995) that, “people do not speak on paper. Transcripts are written forms, and when we freeze interview speech into print, we construct those we have talked to as subordinate writers: We make them look ignorant” (p. 57). Thus, I removed, in the final narrative constructions, a number of ‘ums’, ‘ahs’ and the idiosyncratic adolescent term ‘like’, and similar utterances that served simply to disrupt the flow of the story. In places where such interjections had significance – for example, in illustrating contemplation – I retained them. In other instances, fragmented sentences were joined. I do not believe that this process impacted on the validity of the participants’ stories. The narrative constructions are *their* words, words which represent both *their* experiences and *their* meaning-making of those experiences.

Ultimately, I reached a point of acceptance that I had done as much as I could to help ensure a fair representation of my participants, a process that had its roots in open, honest and transparent relationships with participants prior to and during the interviews. I accepted Riesmann's (1993) sage advice that "in the final analysis, the work [was mine]" and I had to "take responsibility for its truths" (p. 67).

Voice

Both the participants' and the researchers' voices are present in any narrative inquiry study. Yet, these voices are not always given equal emphasis, for a variety of reasons including, but not confined to, philosophical positioning, participant status and research purpose. For the researcher, voice assumes great significance when deciding how to use their own voice to interpret and present the participants' voices (Chase, 2005). The voice I have used in this study is titled an "authoritative voice" by Chase (2005, p. 664).

An authoritative voice is characterised by both *separation* and *connection* of the participants' and the researchers' voices, each designed to privilege both voices at various times and for various purposes. Thus, in my study there are significant verbatim passages from participants. This was a deliberate strategy I employed, designed to allow both uninterrupted narration and 'ownership' of the story by the participant, and, at the same time, alternative interpretations by readers. The possibility of alternative interpretations by readers was highlighted earlier in this chapter as a key function of narrative research (Polkinghorne, 1988). My voice is separated from the participants in my interpretations of their conversation. This represents my differing interest in their conversations (Chase, 2005).

Both present and past tense were used in the reporting of this study. The use of these two tenses essentially parallels the separation and connection of voices described above. Present tense was deliberately chosen for the narrative constructions as a way of inviting readers into the text. Tierney (1997) suggests that writing narrative in the present tense allows the story to unwind; it enables the reader to stay "with the author as the story unravels" (p. 29). Past tense was used in the meta-analysis section as a way of representing separation of voices. In this instance I was making sense of their stories from the basis of my own body of academic knowledge. Consideration of voice, then, demonstrates an implicit understanding of the responsibilities of narrative researchers to their participants.

Issues of validity

Validity is an issue of concern to all researchers: narrative inquirers are no exception.

Validity, as it relates to narrative inquiry, refers to the “believability of a statement or knowledge claim” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 474). Thus, readers will judge the validity of our work as researchers: they are the people who must be convinced that a knowledge claim is justified. Given the earlier, comprehensive discussion presented in the previous chapter about knowledge claims, it is clear that perspectives on what counts as ‘valid’ will differ, depending on whether one has a correspondence theory of knowledge – that is, one that views knowledge as a mirror of reality – or whether one views knowledge as a social construction. It is difficult, therefore, to speak of validity in traditionally accepted ways – that is, ways of thinking congruent with a correspondence form of knowledge – when working in narrative inquiry which is more congruent with a view of knowledge as a social construction. Bruner (1990) suggests that traditional notions of validity are more illustrative of the paradigmatic way of knowing than narrative. Considered by Kvale (1995) as one of the “scientific holy trinity” (Kvale, 1995, p. 20) of reliability, validity and generalisability of modern social science, traditional notions of validity do not reflect the realities of the postmodern world. It is, in Tierney’s and Lincoln’s (1997) words, a “contested term” (p. vii).

Alternative notions of validity such as trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), “verisimilitude” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 751), “truthlike observations” (Barone & Eisner, 1997, p. 74), and “crystallization” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934) emerge as more relevant to narrative inquiry. Richardson’s (2000) notion of “crystallization”, for example, “deconstructs the traditional idea of ‘validity’” by recognizing that there are more than three sides from which to view the world. Polkinghorne (2007) further suggests that in narrative research readers are asked “to make judgements on whether or not the evidence and argument convinces them at the level of plausibility, credibleness, or trustworthiness of the claim” (p. 477). In narrative inquiry, then, validity relates specifically to personal meaning drawn from stories, not to an observable, measurable truth.

While the debate surrounding this divide was at its height in the 1980s as part of the “paradigm wars” (Polkinghorne, 2007, p. 472), it has re-emerged recently on the research agenda, a situation that Denzin (2009) describes as “like old wine in new bottles, 1980s in a new century” (p. 139). This is, Denzin (2009) claims, primarily a result of the new “global audit culture” (p. 139). Our need, then, as narrative researchers, to present an articulate and convincing justification of our methods for enhancing validity, remains strong.

In this regard, Polkinghorne (2007) describes two specific areas of concern in relation to validity that are particular to narrative research. The first is the “disjunction” between the meaning made from an experience and the actual reporting of that experience by participants (p. 480). This relates to language capacity, reflective and self-awareness capacity, the degree of openness of participants, and the often co-constructed nature of narrative texts. Narrative researchers can increase their claims for validity by being transparent and explicit to readers about how they have attempted to address this disjunction. Furthermore, seeking feedback from participants on how their stories were understood by the researcher is a further way of addressing this validity concern. Harrison et al. (2001) agree, positing that asking participants to provide feedback on early analyses is “a means of ensuring trustworthiness” (p. 323). In an effort to address this second concern heralded by Polkinghorne (2007), I have been transparent and explicit in this study about my approach in both these areas – the disjunction between the lived experience and the telling of that experience, and participant feedback.

Second, Polkinghorne (2007) identifies the interpretation of stories as an area of concern in relation to validity for narrative researchers. He suggests that we, as researchers, be transparent about the position from which we conduct our interpretation – one such position being hermeneutic. Moreover, evidence from the participants’ original text should be used as evidence to support our interpretive claims. I have attended also, to both these considerations, transparently and explicitly in my discussion.

By attending to the incorporation of evidence to support my claims, writing reflexively, interrogating my own interpretations and inherent subjectivity, making transparent my own motivations, and being transparent and explicit in my discussion of: the “gap” (E. Bruner, 1986, p. 6) between the lived experience and the telling of that experience; participants’ feedback; and interpretive methods, I believe I have presented a convincing case for the ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘credibility’ of my work.

Reading the narratives

Each participant’s narrative chapter has a two word title. The first title word is designed to encapsulate the overall re-entry experience for that participant (for example, ‘Metamorphosis’). The second title word is the participant’s pseudonym, the name by which they are known in the narrative.

Each participant’s chapter is divided into two distinct sections: an initial *narrative* section (covering both the overseas experience and the re-entry experience) followed by a concluding

analysis section. In the *narrative* section, the participant's voice is identifiable by *italics*. My voice, as the researcher, is identifiable by conventional font (that used in the remainder of this dissertation). The *analysis* section is also presented in conventional font.

Conclusion

This chapter has mapped the methodological research journey in this study from analysis of data through to the final reporting. It has described and justified the process of analysis undertaken as well as the structure of reporting employed. In doing so, it has highlighted the often contentious and characteristically complex, multi-layered, non-linear nature of narrative analysis and reporting.

The next six chapters represent both the 'results' and the 'discussion' of this study. They are presented as six individual narratives.

Evolution

Lynette

With a sharp stab of wonder he reminded himself, as he had done a hundred times in the last few weeks, that he had really come home again...he remembered that less than a year before he had gone abroad in anger and despair, seeking to escape what now he had returned to.

(Thomas Wolfe, *You Can't Go Home Again*)

Introduction

I am anxious. I am waiting for Lynette to arrive for our first interview. I have travelled two and a half hours to another city especially for this interview. Last week our first planned interview was cancelled at the last moment because of her mother's health. As late as yesterday afternoon, Lynette was still unsure whether she would be able to make today's meeting. Although I have had a number of email communications with her, I do not know what to expect. Her email correspondence has had an urgency about it – illustrative of someone who is 'stretched' for energy and resources. She walks through the door, smiling tentatively. She seems nervous and uncertain. She plays with her fingers, splayed on the table, deep in thought, while I set up and explain the recording system. I steal glances at her full round face framed by short dark hair. She looks up and makes eye contact. She seems anxious.

Lynette is a 24 year old Business student with a passion for Psychology, which she has studied as her major. While the thought of completing a Psychology degree was always appealing, she recognised that a Business degree would open up more career opportunities.

Psychology was always my favourite subject, but I was doing it within a Business degree because that way I figured I would probably get more into the real world kind of jobs; it would open up more career opportunities. I still really don't know what I want to do, but Entrepreneurship and stuff like that is so right up there.

I ask Lynette how she got involved in the overseas exchange program at uni.

I just wanted to get totally away. I have this mess of family relationships, which has sort of grown over the last few years. My relationship with my family has changed dramatically in

*the last three or four years, since my parents broke up. I've sort of been dragged in and it does my head in. I didn't want any more of that. Also, I love travel. I'd been to Germany on an exchange for 5 months when I was in grade 11 and that was really good and I'd heard that the university had an exchange program and I thought, "That sounds really good." **And** they gave you \$3000. Because I'd already been on an exchange and really enjoyed it, it sounded like a good opportunity. I have definitely always been adventurous, a bit of a risk-taker, so going to Malta didn't seem like such a big deal. I actually spent a year and a half applying and going through the process because I didn't get accepted the first time. They only take two Australian students a year in Malta. The first time I actually applied to the Uni of South West Florida because they also gave an extra five grand because it was a new exchange program, but I didn't get into that and I didn't get into Malta either. When I finally got accepted in Malta, I said to the lady who made the final decision, "You're the one who rejected me the first time!" And she said, "Yes, but I am also the one who accepted you the second time."*

Lynette produces a wry smile. This is the first of many indications of a feisty, assertive, independent young lady. I realise very quickly that her initial tentativeness masks great strength of character. I am beginning to know what to expect.

Being in Malta

Lynette's time in Malta is different to anything she has experienced before. It is fun and exciting – just the escape she is seeking from her life in Australia. She doesn't experience homesickness and is reluctant to leave at the end of her exchange.

Room with a view

I ask Lynette why she was initially attracted to Malta as a site for her exchange.

*Well, two reasons, really. First, it's in the Mediterranean – I've **always** wanted to go to Italy, but all the universities there teach in Italian. Funny, though, I didn't go to Italy while I was there in the Mediterranean. And the second reason is they teach in English in Malta.*

Lynette lives in Malta for almost five months, in Msida, a relatively short bus ride from the capital, Valletta. She lives in an expensive penthouse overlooking the island of Malta and the Mediterranean Sea, paid for with a \$5000 loan.

It was fantastic. It was right next to the university; I couldn't have lived any closer if I'd tried. Sometimes you could see Sicily from my balcony. The water was this beautiful, beautiful blue. I must have had a 300 degree view. And all these beautiful Maltese buildings, so different to anything I had ever seen. I was expecting something more Greek, like I was expecting all the buildings to be white, but they were sandstone colour and kind of Arabic. When I flew over Dubai some of it looked similar. The oldness of the buildings was really cool. I also had a view of this old fortified city. It was a really modern apartment, five floors up, and it was sort of open plan with these cool wall dividers that didn't quite go to the ceiling or the floor. There was a wooden floor and white tiles and this huge floor to ceiling glass that went on to the balcony. And great red couches with soft material.

Lynette had been living with her mum for the eight months prior to her exchange, a situation she found challenging. This compounds her sense of delight at finally having her own space – perhaps even helps to explain her choice of apartment. One of the challenges she faces, though, is that her apartment is isolated from the main party area. Reluctant to spend money on taxis, her solution is to bring the parties to her penthouse.

I had this awesome space, like really amazing space. Everyone who came and saw it said, "Ooooh." I had people come to parties in my penthouse, half of them were strangers, and they just fell in love with it, with the views. The balcony, it was just fantastic.

I had three cocktail parties while I was there. My cocktail parties were always fun. Everyone brought along a different bottle of spirits or liqueur and we made cocktails, like a real cocktail party. I had the perfect pad for it. At the first two parties, people got stuck in the elevator! Like, the elevator holds four people and five people tried getting in and they got stuck. They were there for an hour and a half! Luckily someone found this key and they could climb out, half on one floor and half on the other. For the second party, four of them were in the lift, but there was this huge big American and it got stuck again. That became an ongoing thing – "Did someone get stuck in the elevator?" Maltese craftsmanship probably has something to do with it! The last one was a costume party. I've got this great photo of a fire woman spanking this guy who is in drag and wearing a purple wig and it's pretty funny and it summarises the fun I had and the cool people I met.

Lynette's description of her first month in Malta resonates very strongly with Oberg's (1960) conception of the initial "honeymoon stage" experienced by sojourners (p. 182).

In my first month I was just running around really excited, going, “Oh, oh I am in Malta, I am in the Mediterranean. Oh, look at this.” It was great. Really, really good. And then I started settling into life.

Understanding Malta

Lynette shares, with amusement and fondness, and noticeably without judgement, some of the quirky qualities that she believes characterise Maltese life.

Malta’s funny, like Maltese people and Maltese culture is different to anywhere in the world. You have to live it to really know. For example, the electricians and builders are a bit dodgy. My friend had this place where the electricity and water were going through the same pipe! Actually, I had water dripping through two of my light fittings in the kitchen and that was never seen to. They just take shortcuts. He told me this story about a woman who complained about her roof leaking and she called the landlord and she said, “There’s a hole in my roof and there is water coming through”, and the landlord said, “Eh, that is because it is raining.”

And there are no laws about copyright. So, just ten years ago, there was this place called KFC that had absolutely no relation to the Colonel and they were selling chicken and stuff. Oh, and cars – they do a lot of erratic driving. You see a lot of funny things. They only put in traffic lights about 10 or 15 years ago and apparently everyone was against it. There are only two or three sets on the whole island. And another funny thing, the drivers don’t look each way before they cross a street, they just honk their horn. It is classic. It is one of those classic nuances, every time, you are just walking along and you hear these horns. They have a whole different way of thinking about driving over there. It’s like, “I’m here and I’m doing this,” and everyone else is just kind of on the defence. It was great fun – especially as a pedestrian!

Another good example of Malteseness is, they’ve got this rubbish dump, I guess you would call it, but it is like this man-made mountain. It’s made of rubbish and it’s stinky and bad and has lots of rats in it and there have been fires in this mountain of rubbish, on-going, for 14 years! You can see little bits of smoke coming out – it’s just crazy. Everyone scowls upon it, but what can you do? I just thought it was hilarious that there had been a fire going in there for 14 years.

Lynette is a self-confessed cat lover; her cat features regularly in our conversations. The abundance of feline life on Malta was an unexpected bonus for her.

There were cats all over Malta. I loved it.

In attempting to capture the essence of Maltese relationships, Lynette both highlights its uniqueness, and offers some insight into the reason for her relatively limited contact with locals.

English is the main language, but the older people all speak Maltese to one another. Sometimes you wish you could speak Maltese just to know what they were talking about. They would switch between Maltese and English and most of the time they didn't realise. If you asked them at the end of a conversation what language they'd used, they couldn't tell you. Sometimes the teachers would do that and then they would look at me and remember and go back and repeat it in English.

The Maltese are very Catholic, very Catholic, very family oriented and they don't go to each other's houses, like even same sex people just really don't get invited to your house to play. If you are going to meet someone you would meet them out in a public place and do stuff with them there. I was quite surprised by that and they've got this whole Catholic culture where there is no sex before marriage. People do it, but they hide it and I don't know, it is sort of weird. Like, that's the way the old people would have lived, but the younger people... You know, you have these guys living with their mum until they're really old. I never went to anyone's house, I think, except for other international students. A lot of Maltese are sort of cliquy, and they get into their little groups and speak Maltese.

Exploring

Lynette's earlier positioning of herself as *a bit of a risk-taker* is exemplified by her descriptions of exploring Malta's ruins. Her eyes sparkle noticeably, and she smiles constantly throughout her sharing of her adventures. At times she shakes her head: I am unsure whether in wonderment about the sites or in awe of her own behaviour.

There was one time I was walking along, I think I was going to do some shopping, but I ended up getting a bit lost in some back street and I started walking across country over this sort of big back yard. It was like it didn't belong to anyone. It was surrounded by all these other houses and there was this old, rusty gate and this huge run-down mansion behind it. It

was all closed off. Anyway, I scaled this rusty fence, which was a bit wobbly, and got through this gap in the bars and went and explored this old mansion. I don't know what it used to be, probably an old government building, or a rich person's house. There was a big courtyard filled with plants and graffiti on the walls. The staircase was falling down and there were bits missing and rocks falling down. You could see some of the original tiles and it made me wonder what it used to be. I started imagining what it would look like, all made up. It was really amazing, though, and I just walked around and explored. That was a good experience. It was like a little adventure and it wasn't planned, and it was all kind of run down and kind of like, "You shouldn't be here because it isn't safe." I never saw it again.

Another time we went to the Hypogeum. It's this world heritage listed three-storey, prehistoric underground temple. You have to go on a guided tour, and they can only take a few people at a time. You have to book weeks in advance. Underground, there were these windows carved out, and there was this big, round room with little slots in it and a big deep well, in which they found a fully preserved person. There were statues of fat women and pregnant women – that was a recurring theme. They were speculating about ceremonies that might have been held there. They also found thousands of human remains of both genders and all ages, but only one full skeleton, apparently. It would have been fantastic to have been down there by yourself to explore it.

From there I went with some of my friends to these catacombs. This one wasn't a guided tour, so you could do whatever you wanted to in there. We were just running around. It was fantastic. It was a bit of a contrast – the freedom to walk around and explore it for yourself. You know, it was really dark, and at one point I was there by myself, and just in this dark room with a torch, shining around the underground tavern. One of my friends took me into this room and there was this little window thing you had to climb through to get into another cavern. We walked around and then realised it was a dead end. We walked back through the windowy thing, but we were in this other cavern, and there was no way out. My friend goes, "Where's the exit?" I was scouting around and it was really freaky. I finally found it – it was a tiny little hidden staircase. It took me ages to find it. That was really cool.

I also went on a 'Try dive' kind of thing that the uni offered. We went to Gozo, and it involved abseiling and scuba diving. There was this inland sea, kind of thing. There were two people per instructor and we just learnt some basic things and then went in. At the mouth of this cave the water became really clear and that was so cool, and just the whole underwater breathing thing. It was the first time I'd ever done anything like that. I mean, the opportunity was there. I do like taking opportunities when they come along.

In Malta, Lynette is busy soaking up all life has to offer.

Relationships

Lynette spends much of her time on the harbour with ‘boat people’ – people travelling from around the world who *dumped their boats and stayed put because it was winter* – a situation that connects her less with locals and more with international travellers. She befriends an Irish man – Garry – who was once married to a Maltese lady and who now owns a pub on the waterfront. It is here that she meets and befriends these international travellers. After the first month, Lynette finds herself spending most evenings at the pub, something she describes as *being a bit of a pattern, not quite boring, but a bit repetitive*. The fact that her university timetable affords her a four day weekend each week, means that time on the harbour is maximised.

I did also have some friends who were international students – a girl from the Caribbean, a nice French couple, an Italian girl, a Danish girl and a Bulgarian girl. One of my best friends, Paul, he was a local, but not your typical local. He got along better with foreigners than with locals. He was less traditional than locals, and more outgoing. He was self-professed different to all the others.

Lynette explains how much more she enjoys the company of Australians when they are overseas.

At home, everyone is just normal, well, not normal I suppose, Australians at home are just “This is us, this is what we do, this is who we are” and you can break it down into all the different social structures and you have all these different schemas and prejudices and other things that go on. Whereas, when you’re overseas, it is just like, “Yeah, we are both Australian, and that’s all you need”. You are friends with people over there that you wouldn’t be friends with in Australia because you don’t have as much in common with them as you do over there. I remember we went on a pub crawl in Gozo and they played the song ‘We Come From a Land Down Under’ and it was like, “YEAH!” They had this big projector on the wall with a kangaroo hopping. It’s a lot of fun being Australian over there.

Lynette goes on to share an incident involving an Australian that occurs during her first days in Malta, an incident that reinforces her appreciation of Australians and their characteristic style.

There was an Aussie yacht I met one night. I wrote a song about it, actually. It was my third day in Malta. I'd met this local Maltese guy who offered to help me with some shopping and we ended up going to this restaurant and ordering a couple of pizzas. He went off to the toilet, and I noticed this Australian guy at the table next to me, so I started talking to him. Anyway, the Australian was halfway through this conversation when the Maltese guy came back, and I was just about to introduce them, but thought I would let the Aussie finish his sentence. Ten seconds later, I look up and the Maltese guy takes off! He left me with the pizza and the wine bill! That was the last I saw of him.

I tried ringing him, but he just hung up the phone. I was freaking out a bit, you know, he had my groceries in his car and he left me with the bill. Anyway, the Aussie guy says, "How much did your groceries cost? Here's 10 pounds. Get yourself down to Woolies and buy yourself some more bloody groceries." It was just so Australian. It was delightful. So, that helped settle me down a bit. When I did eventually get to talk with the Maltese guy, he said "I am not a thief. I am not a man to be made a fool of." I think he thought he was going to be paying for dinner, which we hadn't discussed, but I later found out that Maltese guys expect to pay for everything. I could half laugh at it, but I felt really bad. I don't think it affected me in any significant way, but I did think about it a few times while I was there. At least I got a song out of it: I started rapping a few years ago, and then started writing last year. I finished my first song just before I went to Malta. I actually recorded three songs while I was there as well which was cool.

Although not considered a particularly significant incident by Lynette, her meaning-making of this event indicates a capacity for a degree of objective cultural perspective. She is interpreting, and therefore making sense of, the incident from the host culture's perspective – a skill referred to by Triandis (1975) as *isomorphic attribution*.

Contact with family and home is limited, but even limited contact is uncomfortable for Lynette.

Mum sent me something for Christmas and I got a card from my nan. I went on Skype when I was at the pub and spoke to a couple of friends – that was about half way through my trip. I think mum rang me twice and the circumstances weren't the best. I only gave my phone number to mum after a couple of months. In fact, I didn't even want to give anyone my number. I had my own space and I didn't want it being tarnished by being dragged back into this other crap. That was still back here. And mum wasn't even checking on what I was doing,

it was just telling me what they are doing and telling me all this crap that I don't want to hear. Just don't get me started on family crap. My brother did come and stay from England for one weekend. That was good. I don't remember feeling homesick. The only thing I did miss in Malta was my cat.

Lynette appears disgruntled by her mother's lack of interest, her mother's motive in phoning interpreted as more selfish and *self*-focussed than selfless and *other*-focussed. Yet, Lynette's mother's apparent disinterest in her overseas experience is not peculiar. Although still overseas at the time, Lynette's experience mirrors the findings of many sojourners' re-entry experience – that others at home tend to be more interested in sharing news of the home culture than listening to stories about the overseas experience (see, for example, Austin, 1983a; Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Osland, 1995; Smith, 2002b; Weaver, 1994).

Academe

Like so many of the participants in my study, it is only when I prompt Lynette that information about university and study – ostensibly the primary reason for the exchange – is forthcoming.

I did a lot of Psychology subjects – Addictive behaviour, Media Psychology, Psychology of Mass Communication and Philosophical Psychology. They were a mixture of third and fourth year subjects. I also did two Master of Creativity units based on the work of Edward de Bono. One was on the Six Thinking Hats and one on Direct Attention Thinking Tools. Edward de Bono was born in Malta, did you know? They were very good because, even though I knew about Edward de Bono, I didn't know much about his work. Oh, yeah, and I did Maltese for Foreigners, but that was only one hour a week, so you really can't be expected to learn much. I did learn how to say, "Thank you, darling!" but a young Maltese girl taught me that!

The classes were smaller than you get here in the big lecture theatres. A couple of them were about 20 – 30 people, a couple were 40 – 50, but the Philosophical Psychology class only had three. They only had lectures, no tutorials, although philosophy was more like a tutorial with only three people. There wasn't as much assessment as here. For most of the units, there was only one piece of assessment, and that made up your entire grade. There was one oral exam, some presentations and some written assessments. One of my English friends was studying Criminology and Sociology there, and for some of the second year units she was studying she had assessments like, designing a T shirt and in class one day they had to see how many words they could make from the word, 'Sociology'. Apparently, in one of her

classes the teacher used to sit and smoke a pipe, which is not only illegal, it's just, you know. I mean, I don't think the standard of that university would hold, compared to most of the others in the world.

Lynette chortles quietly while telling this story, her eyes, as during most of the interviews, firmly focussed on her hands and the table. She makes little eye contact, and when she does it is limited in duration. She is contemplative and thoughtful in her response to my questions during the interviews. I respect the integrity she shows in thinking carefully about each of my questions, seeking clarification where necessary and choosing not to comment in some instances where to do so would mean *just making something up*. I have come to see her lack of eye contact as reflective of her deep, introspective thinking style, not her lack of comfort with the situation.

Being home

Being home is challenging for Lynette. She finds letting go of her Maltese way of life and reconnecting with her previous Tasmanian life a difficult thing to do; Malta and Tasmania represent such different ways of being. Her thoughts and emotions undergo considerable change, however, throughout her first six months home as she seeks to make sense of her own and others' reactions to her re-entry.

Disengaging, reengaging

Lynette is initially destabilised by her re-entry experience, but what begins as a difficult journey ends in greater acceptance and understanding of herself and others.

After two months

It was kind of exciting when I first touched down in Australia. I wanted to kiss the ground – but I didn't! I thought, "I am really home. I'm back amongst my own kind." But the novelty wore off pretty quickly. Well before I went to sleep that day, I sure wished I was in Malta again. I was sad to come back, actually. I felt homesick for Malta. When I got back, I just missed it. I missed all these wonderful people I had met. Just the whole lifestyle, the differentness of it. I kind of got into it, and enjoyed it, and when I got back it was "Ugghhh!" It was like, "What am I doing here? This is awful. I want to be back in Malta!" If I had been able to change my ticket, I might well have done, but it was a non-refundable, non-changeable one. Sometimes I would just go around randomly saying, "I miss Malta" – more frequently at the beginning of my time back.

After four months

Lynette's sense of homesickness for Malta seems to have abated somewhat after four months home. In the few months she has been home she shows considerable movement in her thinking. She is more futuristic in her orientation. She is looking through the windscreen rather than the rear view window. This re-connection with her home culture has, no doubt, been assisted by her securing of tutoring work at the university in her home city.

There is a difference between the feeling of being home now and the feeling I had when I first got home. When I first got home it was a bit of an anti-climax and I missed Malta and wished I were still there. Now, I'm a bit more comfortable back in Australian life again and getting on with things. You know, "That was a nice little holiday, but I'm home again now." It's a bit of the same old, same old, but I'm also working out what to do with my future and where I'm going to go next. I'm not happy just sitting here doing nothing. To some extent, those feelings of disappointment and boredom get better because you just get back into the swing of things. I probably had that feeling for a good six weeks. Also, I've been away in Melbourne for a while with my boyfriend, so, in a way, that has taken up some of the mental energy that probably would have been spent in that state. I think I am going to move to Melbourne, but I am not sure if I will work here for second semester, or leave straight after I mark exams next month.

I was watching Eurovision the other night and Malta came on. I was able to identify with the culture and with Malta and sort of miss it and feel affectionate towards it. It was like, "Go Malta!"

She reflects on a number of incidents during her first weeks back in Australia. She is animated during much of this discussion. The first week home she is in Melbourne, gathering her belongings – including her cat. She describes her beloved cat as *good to come back to*, but the reunion was *a bit of an anti-climax*.

When I first went to get him, he wouldn't come; I called him for ages and even shook his biccies. I had to go back and get him the next day, the little bugger. Yeah, he'd changed a bit. He'd spent more time outside and didn't want to give me as many cuddles. Last night I made him come into my room and sleep on the end of my bed. It was something; he is so cute and fluffy.

She returns to Tasmania on the Sunday of the first week home. On Monday she is required to attend a week of intensive classes for her Honours degree in Marketing.

I ended up dropping out. It was like one of the most stressful things. It was really perpetuated and inflamed by the fact that I was living 45 minutes away from the uni, had no source of income or transport, so, yeah, I was hitchhiking to uni that first week with my flatmate. I didn't even make it on the Wednesday and had a dodgy truck driver experience on Thursday. And I was getting piles of paper to read every night. Yeah, I couldn't handle it. So, I'm not studying at the moment. I think it wasn't helped by the fact that I'd been away. It was a lot harder to get back down and concentrate and switch straight back. I think I didn't allow myself enough time between coming back and starting back at uni. What probably made it harder was that Honours was so hard and uni work in Malta was so easy.

Lynette's description of initial meetings with friends reflects the stereotypical re-entry experience captured by numerous anecdotal accounts in the literature over recent decades (see, for example, Osland, 1995, Raschio, 1987; Storti, 2001).

My first weekend back in Tasmania I went down to the local coffee and bar area and I saw a bunch of my old friends and everyone was just down there doing the same old thing. I felt awful. Like, to start with, it was ok, but then I started seeing people I knew and it was really disappointing. No-one seemed over-enthused to see me and because I'd just spent five months away, and all the wonderful friends I'd met in Malta were so much more animated and interesting, everyone at home seemed exactly the same, doing the exactly the same old stuff, and it just made me seem, I don't know, it made me feel depressed. I felt really out of sorts that night; it was just not exciting. It was almost as if we had nothing to talk about. It was not so much what anyone said, but the silence. I couldn't really sum up my experiences in Malta because I didn't know how to and nothing had changed since I'd been away. I couldn't actually explain it like I felt it – all my wonderful emotions and experiences. Combined with the fact that they hadn't had any of those same experiences; they'd just had the same old ones I'd had a thousand times before. It's like you're going back in time five months. Like you're not making the most out of things, or something. And then I think, if I stay here another five months, it's going to be the same again and again for the rest of my life. I feel like I'm wasting some precious time.

I tried to talk to one of my friends about it. I said, "This is crap." She tried to make me feel a bit better, but she had boyfriend dramas and that took over. Sometimes people would ask about Malta and I would begin to tell them and then they'd go off and start talking about the footy or something! I mean, there is no-one I know personally that I think could relate to my sort of specific experience. You would want somebody who had been through the same thing.

Lynette's frustration is congruent with many returnees' experience; having friends who have travelled and can, therefore, relate more directly to others' overseas experiences, has been shown to facilitate the re-entry process (see, for example, Lank, 1985; Raschio, 1987).

I even remember when my best friend came back from living in Japan for a year or two and I asked her about it and she was like, "Yeah, it was really cool" and she was telling some of the things she'd done, but in a way they were just words and I didn't know the places she was talking about. I remember thinking that it sounded cool, but I couldn't really picture it. It's funny, I only just reflected on that then – interesting.

It's just such a big shock when you first come back and you've done so many exciting things and everyone else is just exactly the same, doing exactly the same things. So much has happened to you and you have seen and done so much – and probably changed a bit – and everyone else is just the same, exactly the same.

A broadened world view, as described by Lynette, characteristically contributes to the divide often experienced between returnees and those at home; the fact that things at home seem *not* to have changed exacerbates Lynette's sense of frustration, a common outcome indicated in other re-entry literature (Howell, 2002; Thompson & Christofi, 2006).

I think it is made worse by the fact that we live in Tasmania because it is a place that changes less than other places. I felt homesick for Malta and bored – a bit ambivalent to the whole being home thing. I didn't like those feelings, but I had to live with them, and then they slowly dissipate as you get on with the rest of your life.

Something I've noticed since I got back is that I've overheard conversations between local people and it has really opened my eyes to how little they have experienced, or how much I've experienced. Many locals have never been out of the state. I can't identify with that anymore. And it makes me not want to talk because I don't want to rub it in, and it's almost like I would be a bit of an outsider now because of my experience overseas. I would be a freak if I told them what I had actually done.

Her interpretation of family relationships indicates a more objective, and less emotional, perspective than when she first arrived home.

My family asked me what it was like. I tried to talk to my mum about it, and she was just like, “Oh well, that’s normal, you will settle back down.” My dad has put my whole Malta trip in a negative way by saying, “Oh, you have no direction in life. You just wasted five months overseas.” When he said that, I wasn’t quite angry, more perturbed, I think, about him saying I’d wasted five months when it was such a good experience. And then there’s a bit of fear, you know, that he’s actually telling the truth, because he is my dad and he’s saying I’m doing the wrong thing. Even though I know he’s not a very rational man...I think maybe his intentions are right – he wants me to do well and get a good job and be secure in my future, but he’s annoying. I just get sick of hearing him bitch.

In some ways, my time in Malta meant that I was a little bit estranged from my family because I’ve had this experience that none of them can relate to. I’d done and seen things they hadn’t and I couldn’t really communicate it to them either. My brother said, “Hey, how was Malta? Cool.” And that was pretty much it.

After six months

For our third and final interview, we meet in Lynette’s house. She is apologetic over the last minute change of plans for our final interview. She offers me water as she ushers me into her small, sparsely furnished dining room, adjoining the kitchen. She is somewhat distracted by her cat and her cooking, but she still manages to astound me in this, our briefest interview, with her perceptive and insightful interpretation of her re-entry experience. There is a significant change in Lynette’s perspective between four and six months home. She is more distanced in her observations now; she is more of an observer of herself than she was some months ago.

*Maybe it wasn’t just everyone else being the same when I got back that I was scared of. More to the point, it was me being scared of **me** being in exactly the same position as before I left. I was taking out my frustration of not wanting to do the same old thing by pointing out that everyone else was doing the same old thing and getting frustrated with them doing it! I feel less like that now because I am doing more things and things are developing here. I’m finding more direction. I just realised that now, as I read back over this summary you’ve written of my second interview.*

It really doesn’t seem to matter as much anymore because I’m not as full of the hype as I was when I first came back and I think that was part of why I was so disappointed because I had all this excitement that I just wanted to vent and express. Now I have settled back in so it’s like, yeah, I went to Malta, that was pretty cool, I did all these really good things, but now I

am doing all these other wonderful things back here. If someone wanted to know all about Malta and give me chance to relive it, I wouldn't really care.

Hmmm, it's interesting, I'm just reading back over the bit about my mum saying, "You'll settle down" – in response to my re-entry dilemma – and it sounds a bit dismissive. But now I don't think that it was dismissive. I just accept it as being from someone who hadn't had the same experience.

You know, some of my friends have just come back from South America – which I know nothing about – and I thought back to what we'd talked about in our interviews, about what people really need when they come home, and I really tried, but there was definitely some kind of communication gap where I couldn't quite know what they had done. I really haven't seen much of them or talked to them much because I feel like the people who first disappointed me when I came back! I even remember when my best friend came home from living in Japan for a year. I asked her about it and she told me about all the things she'd done, but in a way they were just words and I didn't know the places she was talking about. It sounded really cool, but I just couldn't picture it. I just reflected on that then. What can you say.

Redefining self and home

Lynette's attempts to make sense of *self* and *space* reflect both a sentient state and a cognitive one.

After four months

I've really, really started to appreciate the natural beauty of Tasmania. Like, really hard core. It wasn't until I went to Malta that I really started appreciating the landscape here. Malta was just a barren rock! I was living in Petersville when I first got back, and that is about 45 minutes drive from Uni. Just the drive to and from uni, I would be in awe, looking at how beautiful everything was. Now I'm living in the suburbs and I have this wonderful view of the mountain. I just love being outside, looking at it. Just grass and trees and the whole nature thing. In Malta, it's all flat; it's all the same colour; it's all rock. I just really, really appreciate being able to see all this wonderful nature around me. I actually comment on the beauty of my surroundings a lot more now. And I feel happier just to look at it. It actually feels good inside. It fills me with happiness just to be here, you know – just physical surroundings, I mean. I spent a week in England over the New Year – I'd been in Malta three

or four months by then – and I remember going to a park and running around going, “Oh, grass, trees!”

Lynette clearly feels she’s different since returning from Malta, but seems to struggle articulating that difference. She sits and thinks, beginning, then hesitating before her final response.

I think I’m a happier person having been in Malta. As far as life experience goes, it was awesome. I do have a new perspective of things like the Tassie stuff, the parochialism. I see it a bit differently. I mean, everyone says you have to go away to appreciate it, but I don’t think people even appreciate that phrase until they actually do it. I think since coming back I see that maybe Australians are a little bit more selfish than I thought. I don’t know.

I don’t think I’ve changed much as a person. Maybe I have changed. I don’t know if I have or not. Of course, you’re still the same person and have the same beliefs and everything, but maybe it just broadens your outlook a bit.

Tasmania will always be where I’m from and I will want to live here again. But I don’t think I’d call anywhere home right at the moment. I don’t know where that will be. Home could be taken as a lot of places, but probably where you have ownership of space and security – they would be the two biggest. And maybe some degree of other people. That’s the difference between a house and a home, isn’t it, people.

Lynette’s comments mirror Storti’s (2001) assertion that the notion of ‘home’ is often compromised for returnees, so that to re-enter “is to be temporarily homeless” (p. 19). Although Lynette can articulate what ‘home’ means to her, she doesn’t know, currently, where that home is.

I’m planning what to do next with my life. I’m not happy just sitting here doing nothing. I mean, that feeling has got better because you do just get back into the swing of things. But I think there is this element of more different, exciting, wonderful things out there. I want to make music and there are a lot more opportunities in Melbourne for that. I met a marimba player on my recent trip to Melbourne, and he wants to do some stuff with me. So, there’s a few things on the go. I mean, this tutoring job is good at the moment, but it’s not what I want to do long term. At the most I will do it next semester and then move on. I don’t think I could stay here, at this stage, for any great amount of time. Not only because I’ve just been to Malta, but because there are so many more exciting things out there and it’s a bit of an anti-

climax being back, just because of jobs. I feel like I'm wasting precious time. I've come back and in four months nothing has changed. I'm still in a bit of a hovery kind of, don't know what to do kind of thing. So, I am sort of open to suggestions and the idea of going off and doing all these things is... I've always had a pretty big risk-taking element.

This is the second time that Lynette has mentioned her risk-taking during our interviews.

After six months

After six months, Lynette seems more settled. She has re-established some routine in her life and is gracious in her comments about others, reflecting a definite move in perspective. She is less 'idiocentric' (focussed on the impact of her behaviour on herself) and more 'allocentric' (focussed on the impact of her behaviour on others) (Triandis, Leung, Villareal, & Clack, 1985).

It feels a lot more normal being home now. I guess I've got myself together again and I'm back on the track of the things I am doing here. I've settled back in, I guess. I just spent a week in Melbourne at a Rap Battle. I have next semester to plan for – I have got jobs lined up and stuff. Yeah, and I've moved into a new house and we have a few cats and chickens.

After six months home, Lynette is even more enamoured of the pristine Tasmanian environment and recognises the durability of her perspective.

I suppose I didn't appreciate growing up with all the nature and stuff I have, until I was deprived of it for so many months. Now I just have this thirst. When I first came back I was having these warm and fuzzies about the place. Coming back here, it is the mountains that I appreciate most. It was definitely just this huge, stark contrast. Even now, five or six months after coming home, it hasn't dissipated. It is actually a lot more long lasting than anything else. The fact that I can appreciate it now, I think, will stay with me forever.

I ask Lynette about re-entry expectations – hers and others.

I guess I was expecting it to be a lot more normal – like you've just been to your friend's house and you've just come home, that sort of thing.

I am surprised by Lynette's last comment. She has experienced re-entry before, so it could be assumed that this has furnished her with more realistic expectations about re-entry. Certainly, other participants in this study – Kate, Marie and Joseph – had realistic expectations about

their re-entry because of their previous experience. While there are mixed findings from re-entry research in terms of previous overseas experience correlating with greater ease of adjustment during re-entry (see, for example, Black et al., 1992; Hammer et al., 1998), it has been consistently documented that unfulfilled expectations result in greater difficulty during re-entry (Martin and Harrell, 1996). Life at home for Lynette was not as she expected; her expectations were unfulfilled. This undoubtedly contributed to her sense of unease during re-entry.

I ask her about others' expectations of her.

“Get a real job and stop wasting time.”

Lynette's recollection of her father's earlier comment about her re-entry causes her to smirk. To me, her smirk suggests the development of a more distanced perspective – certainly a less emotional one than previously – to her family's response.

She is able to see in hindsight what might have made her re-entry a little easier.

I would definitely tell people to send fortnightly emails to all their friends – at once – and make sure you've got everyone included before you leave and give really detailed accounts as you go. That would make things a lot easier. Your friends will appreciate hearing it while it's fresh in your mind and you will be able to give them details you might otherwise forget later. And you also forget what you tell people when you get back and you get less passionate about it the more you talk about it. Yeah, it would just be better for everyone. They would have some experience of what you'd been up to, so they might be able to ask you specific questions when you get back. Maybe if there had been a way I could have sat everyone down at once when I came back and gone through it all as one big experience, then I could just tell everyone at the same time. You know, you sometimes forget what you've told some people and you don't tell other people things.

Although you can have a wider perspective on life, it doesn't make you any more wise, necessarily, or right or important than others – probably a bit more lucky.

I am struck by both the humility and generosity of Lynette's final comment. It stands in direct contrast to some of her earlier comments in the initial stages of her re-entry which reflected her frustration at others' parochialism.

Final words

Even though the exchange is sort of over with now, and things are getting better at home, there is like this little pocket of excitement in your memories. For me, my memories of my time in Malta are just like this pocket of excitement somewhere inside of me. It is still there in the potential for re-occurrence and that will probably shape how I choose to go forward with the rest of my life, and where. There are a lot of really cool people in the world I haven't met yet!

After I pack up the recording gear, Lynette leads me to her front door, apologising, once again, for the difficulty in arranging this final interview. Her cat wraps itself around my legs in an earnest attempt to garner some attention. I am aware of how much more relaxed Lynette is now, compared with the first time we met. She smiles and waves as I make my way to my car. I can't help but wonder whether I am waving to a future academic, entrepreneur or musician.

Making meaning

How prior experience affected the re-entry

In Lynette's case, 'prior experience' refers primarily to her time in Malta, but also minimally, but nonetheless, significantly, to her prior experience as an exchange student in Germany during high school. While it has been suggested that successive re-entries are less challenging (Storti, 2001), empirical findings in this regard are inconclusive. Certainly in Lynette's case, the challenges of her second re-entry seem not to have been ameliorated because of her first overseas and subsequent re-entry experience. Indeed, Lynette herself admitted having re-entry expectations uninformed by her previous overseas experience: *I guess I was expecting it to be a lot more normal – like you've just been to your friend's house and you've just come home, that sort of thing.* In this sense, Lynette's prior experience in Germany, and of coming home, did not positively impact on her re-entry from Malta. In terms of Malta, some of her experiences had a direct and negative impact on her re-entry, some positive.

The clear juxtaposition between Lynette's experience of Malta and her experience of Tasmania shaped and informed, and in some cases, determined, many of the qualitative aspects of her re-entry. There was a clear and discernible link between her prior experience in Malta and her re-entry experience in Tasmania. In particular, this related to her relationships and subsequent lifestyle, the physical environment, and the academic environment.

Malta offered Lynette escape, freedom and excitement. She had successfully executed her planned escape from the familial responsibilities and challenges of life at home by severely limiting any form of contact with family and friends and had, at the same time, fed her love of travel and engagement with new and adventurous pursuits such as scuba diving. She met a steady stream of interesting, international travellers and *animated* and *exciting* locals, and lived in a spectacular apartment.

Being home meant loss of the freedom and excitement that Malta provided, along with an obligatory re-connection with her family. This was tinged, also, with a fear that returning to Tasmania could mean slotting back into her previous life, *like going back in time five months and doing the same thing again and again for the rest of [her] life*. Like the rural Vermont students in Lank's (1985) study, returning to their small hometown after living in big European cities, life in Tasmania seemed "boring and restricted" in many ways (p. 33). The establishment of more of a routine in life, primarily through the securing of accommodation and part-time work, coupled with the prospect of pursuing a music career in another city, saw this fear abate considerably by Lynette's sixth month home. This capacity to seize *opportunities* – a term that arose on numerous occasions during our interviews – was illustrative of her desire to exercise more control over the direction of her life. She wanted to experience more of those *different, exciting, wonderful things out there*, something congruent with her self-described *risk-taking element*. Believing that she was moving forward in life – not standing still – was instrumental in Lynette's re-entry adjustment.

The difference between life in Malta and life in Tasmania made Lynette's re-entry more challenging. 'Cultural distance' is a concept from cross-cultural literature that refers to the cultural difference between cultures and the consequent difficulties people have in adjusting to such difference or 'distance'. Although findings from re-entry research are mixed, there is some evidence to suggest that cultural distance can impact negatively on re-entry, just as it can in adjusting to an overseas culture. Like the participants in Christofi's and Thompson's (2006) study, for example, Lynette's constant comparison between her host culture and her home culture perpetuated difficulties during re-entry. In this particular case, Lynette's difficulty was not so much in coming to terms with 'big C' cultural difference (language, religion and so on), but more so 'small c' cultural difference (personal lifestyle).

Just as with relationships and lifestyle, it was the *stark contrast* between the Maltese physical environment and the Tasmanian environment that aroused in Lynette a previously unparalleled appreciation of the natural beauty of her home state. Exploring derelict buildings and underground temples and catacombs in Malta, along with the view from her

apartment, were described by Lynette as incomparable and memorable experiences. The physical environment, then, clearly played a significant role in Lynette's experience in Malta and provided much of the canvas for her memories once home. Without the *barren rock* experience of Malta, Lynette may never have appreciated, *hard core*, the *wonderful nature around* her in Tasmania. She recognised that after six months, such deep appreciation was likely to be permanent. The fact that Lynette was able to articulate this contrast as the basis for her meaning-making, underscores her deep, reflective thinking style.

Lynette's recent valuing of the natural environment in her home culture – something she hadn't previously *appreciated growing up with* – is congruent with re-entry literature which suggests that some returnees report enhanced appreciation of aspects of their home culture (see, for example, Raschio, 1987; Walling et al., 2006). Recognition of the beauty of the natural environment was the only aspect of Lynette's re-entry that was experienced as consistently strong and positive. She came to a much slower, but sure understanding of other aspects of her re-entry. Appreciation of the natural environment was the only consistent, the most enduring and most positive aspect of her re-entry experience.

Lynette attributed the difference between university life in Malta and Tasmania (amongst other things such as her temporary living arrangements and the recognition that she returned to study too soon after re-entry) to her difficulty in maintaining her Honours position during the early stages of her re-entry. Perhaps it was this situation that contributed to her feelings of being unsettled and directionless, with no clear career pathway. She eventually carved her own new pathway through tutoring and music, but she may have experienced less disorientation had she had a clear purpose from the beginning of her re-entry. Other participants in this study – Marie and Rebecca – had a clear focus on finishing their degree. Both Marie and Rebecca commented on its value in helping to keep them focussed during re-entry.

Theme emerging from the narrative

From *other* to *self*

Adler (1975), in reference to cross-cultural experience, suggests that what “begins with the encounter of another culture...evolves into an encounter with self” (p. 18). Lynette's re-entry suggests that she experienced a similar process upon return to her home culture. What began for Lynette as frustration, bewilderment and annoyance with, ambivalence towards, and even blaming of, *others*, for her re-entry difficulties, evolved into an awareness of *herself* and the ways in which her own prior experiences, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour were

contributing to those difficulties. She also developed an awareness of how those qualities were also helping her make sense of others' behaviour. She moved from seeing *others* as responsible for her re-entry experience, to seeing the role *she* played in the process, and to being more understanding of, and less judgemental about, others. This was not about her accepting blame for her re-entry difficulties, or seeing herself solely as responsible for the nature of her re-entry experience, but more about a capacity to be more accepting and understanding of others' behaviour. She was able to interpret the situation more objectively and make sense of it from others' perspective. In doing so she demonstrated a burgeoning sense of self-awareness.

This move in perspective from *other* to *self* by the sixth month home was exemplified in a number of ways. First, she recognised the critical difference that maintaining regular communication patterns with people at home may have made to her re-entry experience. Rather than blaming others for not being able to relate to her and her experience, she could see how the creation of regular, detailed communication patterns from Malta might have been *better for everyone*. It would have helped others to have a more genuine understanding of her experience. She was able to explicitly identify the role *she* could have played in this. She also demonstrated an awareness of her own changes in behaviour throughout the re-entry process – *you forget what you tell people when you get back and you get less passionate about it*.

Prior to this, Lynette was adamant in her desire to have limited contact with family while overseas, reluctant to even make contact or to divulge phone numbers. Her desire to escape had dominated her thinking. She had also interpreted her family's and friends' reaction to her re-entry as *disinterested* or *dismissive*. By the end of the sixth month home, Lynette was able to make different meaning from this; she recognised the difficulty her family and friends would have had in relating to her experience and accepted that she had *estranged* herself from her family, thus exacerbating their ability to relate to her. She reinterpreted previously described *dismissive* behaviour as *accepted as being from someone who hadn't had the same experience*. Perhaps if Lynette had regular contact with others who had previous overseas experience – something the literature suggests eases the difficulties associated with re-entry (Lank, 1985; Raschio, 1987) – some of the challenges of her first few months home may have been ameliorated.

The second illustration of Lynette's move in perspective from *other* to *self*, was that she was able to articulate the difficulties she had in relating to other returnees' overseas experiences. Although a returnee herself, she recognised the limited capacity she had to relate to others' experience, no matter how hard she tried to apply her 'insider' knowledge of re-entry. She

described herself as feeling *like the people who first disappointed me when I came back* when sharing her experience of trying to connect with friends who had recently returned from South America. She showed similar concern about a previous attempt to ‘listen’ to another friend’s overseas stories from Japan. It seems that she was suddenly able, by swapping roles, to see her own re-entry experience differently.

Third, Lynette moved from being judgemental about others at home *being the same*, being *boring*, and *doing exactly the same things*, to recognising that at the core of her judgement was her own fear of herself *being in exactly the same position as before [she] left*. She was, in the early stage of her re-entry, essentially transferring her own fear onto others. She moved from focussing on others (locals) with their lack of experience and *parochialism*, to focussing on herself, recognising that although she may now *have a wide perspective on life*, that *d[id]n’t make [her] any more wise...or important than others – probably a bit more lucky*. She felt it unfair to *rub it in* that she had had different experiences to most other Tasmanians, so chose not to talk too much about her overseas exchange. This is in stark contrast to the early stages of her re-entry where she desperately wanted, but was unable to, *explain all [her] wonderful emotions and experiences*. She recognised that Tasmania changes less than other places, and that, although she *didn’t like those feelings*, she *had to live with them*, and, importantly, she identified that those feelings *slowly dissipate[d]*. That she was aware of this by the sixth month home, is further evidence of her developing sense of self-awareness.

Much of the above is consistent with Ballard’s (1981) and Weaver’s (1994) notion of one of the outcomes of a cross-cultural experience being the capacity to be both observer and participant of your own and another culture. It is a duality that enhances one’s ability to make sense of, and be accepting of, the self as a cultural being. Lynette’s capacity to be both observer and participant of her own re-entry behaviour, and observe and participate in the outcomes of others’ behaviour at home, parallels this capacity. She had more clarity on others’ behaviour. She was able to see, after six months, what she couldn’t see when she first came home.

Conclusion

Lynette’s re-entry was characterised by her cognitive appraisal of the process. She was, by the end of six months home, able to articulate, and make sense of, the process of re-entry that she experienced. Our interviews became sites of meaning-making for her. This was exemplified numerous times throughout the interviews when she would say, for example, *I’ve just reflected on that then*, and *I just thought about that as I read over your synopsis of our*

second interview and *I thought back to what we'd talked about in our interviews*. Despite the fact that her first re-entry experience seemed not to have informed her second, she was able to progressively make sense of her most recent re-entry process by reflecting on her own and others' attitudes and behaviours.

In attempting to escape the tyranny of the local (Harvey, 1989) through her overseas exchange, Lynette essentially determined that her re-entry experience would be challenging. The contrast in lifestyle between Malta and Tasmania, and what a return to Tasmania meant for Lynette, was the cause of great angst for her during her first few months home. Lynette's re-entry journey, from one of great emotional and cognitive challenge to one of greater clarity of her own and others' behaviour, underscores the findings of Adler's (1981) seminal study, that for most returnees, adjustment to the home culture occurs within six months. Furthermore, Lynette's re-entry process parallels, in reverse, M. Bennett's (1993) developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. M. Bennett (1993) claims that cultural sensitivity develops from an *ethnocentric* perspective to an *ethnorelative* one. In other words, there is a move from seeing *yourself* and your culture as the centre of the cultural world, to an understanding and acceptance of *others'* cultures. In Lynette's case, her change in perspective on her re-entry was reversed. She moved from seeing *others* as central to her re-entry experience, to a greater understanding of the role she *herself* played in that process. Her evolution in perspective characterised her re-entry experience.

Certitude

Rebecca

*I am often tired of myself and have a notion that by travel
I can add to my personality and so change myself a little.
I do not bring back from a journey quite the same self that I
took.*

(Somerset Maugham, *The Gentleman in the Parlour*)

Introduction

*My partner of eight years cheated on me while I was overseas and we broke up just before I came home. My whole experience of coming home has been coloured by that. **My whole life** is different. Everything is different now.*

I am momentarily stunned. We are just moments into the first interview. Her large, carefully mascaraed eyes well with tears and spill on to her cheeks. I unconsciously slip into active listening mode. “That must have been very difficult for you.” Even as the words leave my mouth I know they are inadequate. Tall, slim and hauntingly beautiful, she sits cross-legged on a chair in my office, proud and erect. Her dark hair and pale skin give her the appearance of a porcelain doll. I make a split-second decision to not interrupt, to allow her to talk freely. This is not about my research project for the present moment.

I saw him. He came over to see me in Sweden for a holiday and in the last week he was there I caught him out with a text message. That’s how I found out. Obviously we broke up and I was in shock, but we sort of hung out and I was on very tenterhooks for a week while we waited for his return flight. I was trying to be nice about it, in full denial. I didn’t really know the gravity of the whole situation until I got home.

She takes a deep breath.

You need to know this because it will affect any thinking I do about reverse culture shock; it’s distracted me from any kind of reverse culture shock, actually, because I’ve just really been mostly dealing with that.

This final comment catches my attention. I am keen to see what unfolds in this and successive interviews. Can you be distracted from reverse culture shock or is it still there, underneath, masked by rawer emotions? I am incredulous that Rebecca has volunteered to participate in my research project amidst such personal angst. More tears roll down her face. Her body heaves with suppressed sobs. The severe juxtaposition of her beauty and her distress disturbs me.

Rebecca is a 26 year old final year Education student. Her six month exchange in Malmö, Sweden is her first *proper overseas trip*, her earlier brief visit to New Zealand *not really counting*. Her self-analysis represents yet another juxtaposition: *I have always analysed myself a lot. I self-bash way too much. That is on my list of “Ten things to do this year – less self-bashing!”*

She describes herself as *not emotionally self-indulgent. I’ve never been shy, probably because I come from quite a loud, overbearing, in-your-face family. I have always been such a ‘thinking it, speaking it, outways’ person. I wear me on my sleeves; I don’t hide me from anyone.*

Her decision to share, from the outset, the intimate details of her personal situation certainly suggests that she does indeed, *wear [herself] on [her] sleeve*. I am intrigued to discover how that is counter-balanced by her *self-bashing*.

Being in Sweden

For the majority of her time in Sweden Rebecca is happy and enjoys the excitement and freedom that *time out* from life at home offers. The last few weeks of her exchange are marred by the unexpected and unwelcome relationship breakdown with her partner.

The initial invitation

Unlike some other participants in this study – Lynette and James, for example – Rebecca does not proactively seek to organise her own exchange. The invitation, rather, comes to her. From the first invitation, her relationship with her long-term partner, Shane, is a consideration in her decision-making.

One day Emily – my close friend – and I were working together in my study and we received a bulk email from the Education Faculty advertising exchange scholarships in Sweden. I

thought it sounded really cool, but Emily said, “You don’t want to leave Shane here, do you?” Shane and I had been together since we were kids. We had never been apart. I remember saying to her, “It’s only six months. He can come over at the end!” Six months is nothing when you’re overseas, having fun and meeting new people. In life, what’s six months? I was really excited, and Shane was, too. He said, “Girls, you should do that. This is really cool. I can come over on a holiday and we can get to see some other countries at the end of the year.” We were all really pumped and excited about it. I have always wanted to go overseas, particularly to non- English speaking countries. I’d wanted to travel for a long time and I liked the idea of studying somewhere just to see how they did it. I would never have picked Sweden; it would never have come to mind, but it was the only option and I thought, “Well, it’s just as good as any other place.” I did a bit of research and it sounded really interesting.

Rebecca, Emily and three other young women from the Faculty are successful in securing exchange scholarships to Malmö.

Being switched on

Rebecca describes her two brothers as being a *100 per cent influence* on her motivation to travel and her attitude towards the experience. She describes their relationship as *incredibly close*.

My brothers have lived overseas for a few years – one has recently come home, actually. They are always saying how much they enjoy themselves overseas. The day before I left, my big brother rang me and said, “When you are away, just suck everything up, just suck it up. I would like to have a better expression, but I don’t have one. I am proud of you. It is an amazing experience. It will switch you back on as a person. Living overseas opens your eyes to how much you don’t know and how much you want to know and how much you want to see. Don’t worry about money; just go over there and switch yourself on.”

Rebecca’s eyes sparkle as she shares her brother’s advice. For the first time in this initial interview, she smiles.

I don’t know at what point, but I’m sure it was once we’d all travelled, that we all just realized how much we loved each other. We’d met all these really good people overseas, but we all just thought, “No, you’re the coolest out of all those people.” And it’s not just us that

recognises that – at my brother’s wedding, someone said, “You can see the love between those three.”

As evidence of this love, Rebecca explains that she stopped off in Edinburgh to see her younger brother before she went to Sweden. He also visited her in Sweden and joined her in Germany for Christmas. Clearly, she relished this physical proximity: *he was just £30 away from me!*

Rebecca also reflects on the influence of a childhood friend, someone with whom she has maintained contact all her life.

I always envied her. She travelled constantly when she was a kid. She’s been to New Zealand, Wales, Utah and Africa. Then she moved to China to teach, met a Canadian and is now living in Toronto. She would always send me pictures of what she had been doing and tell me all about it. I used to think, “Oh, I want to see that!” The way she is about life...I have always admired her.

Travel seeds had long been sown for Rebecca.

Creating a ‘box’

In this, our initial interview, I see the first indications of a quality in Rebecca that characterises her approach to both being away from home and returning – a consciously planned cognitive coping strategy.

I just knew I would be fine to be away from home for six months. Easy peasy. It was sad, and a bit scary, to leave Shane, but I just put the six months in a box and thought, “That’s all I’ve got to do, so just live it up for that time.” That’s the only way I would allow myself to look at it. It was six months of my life, which was nothing. My brother said, “Scary leaving Shane?” I said, “Yeah, but I’m pretty sure we’ve got the goods on it.” And everyone around us was sure on that, too.

I can’t help but reflect on the sad irony of her last comment.

I don’t think I once got homesick. I just missed the people. I missed Shane, and that’s it. I wasn’t worried about my parents or any of that because, like I said, I boxed it into six months and that is how I put it into my head – just six months, it’s nothing, so get on with it and have

a good time. Psychologically, put it in the box. But I did miss Shane. Absolutely. I missed my partner. I think I only had one big tantrum and that was really early on in the piece – the first month, I think. The first month I struggled the most with missing Shane. But my friends, Emily and Liesel – she was from Germany – in particular, were really supportive. I could tell Liesel anything, or be anything in front of her, or do anything in front of her. She was always very aware of how I was feeling. It was important for me to have somebody there who just knew me – she could tell what was stretching me.

Communal Living

Despite some of the inherent challenges, Rebecca relishes communal living in Sweden, a stark contrast to her previous living situation in Tasmania.

In Sweden I really enjoyed having someone around all the time, which is funny because I lived quite a solitary lifestyle the last five years. Shane used to be a shift worker, so I was on my own a lot and happy to be like that. So, being in shared accommodation in Sweden was a huge change.

We lived in this big accommodation block for international students. Emily and I shared a room. We did everything together. Sometimes you might try to shut yourself away in your room and read, but you always ended up with three people sitting on the end of your bed, just talking. Or you'd be in the kitchen having a cuppa with someone – just like family, really. It isn't like a standard friendship – it's family. They know all about you. It's a different kind of friendship because you've lived together. You have bad days and it's not like with friends, if you are a bit snappy or grumpy, and your friend gets shitty because you're being a bit rude, or whatever. It's like, well, you know, we all live together and you are having a bad day, "What can I do to help with that?" – like your family would. So, you stick together. Liesel and Emily, particularly, just accepted you for who you were, with all your warts and all the shitty things you were capable of doing, and had done. Everyone is capable of making mistakes, but they love you anyway.

We had sleepovers a lot. I remember one night we had five beds in my room all lined up in a row. We had all been out having a good time. There would be another room up the hallway with the same thing happening. On a Sunday morning, that was standard. If people were homesick, you'd knock on their door at 2 a.m. and say, "Hey."

Often I'd invite the little family over for dinner – about 12 of us – so there was a lot of cooking going on. Tomas and I cooked the first dinner party on a Saturday night, and it became a bit of a tradition after that. After dinner we'd often go to a club, get home about five a.m., sleep till 11 a.m. and then we'd all get together and have a big cooked English breakfast. That would happen a lot. We were all into evening walks and a lot of exercise. Sundays for me were when my mum and Shane would call, so I'd usually sit on the phone for a couple of hours each Sunday.

Rebecca shares some communal living stories that suggest the fun times were sometimes tempered by challenging situations. The first relates to an Australian boy – *and he was a boy* – who was not only *rude*, but also *inconsiderate*. He would, for example, leave mess in the communal kitchen each time he'd cook. *The European people had just never seen anything like it.* Rebecca and Emily together decided on a non-confrontational approach to the problem: they *[took] him under [their] wing*, pointing out the impact he was having on others around him. *He was so diabolically not suited to living amongst other people like that. There were days when he would really get on my nerves.*

Now I know what she means about being a *thinking it, speaking it, outways person*.

We made our own little place; we created our own international world and bubble. We merged a bit in to the Swedish culture, but not as much as we could have. I mean, we did live like Swedes; we cycled everywhere and we studied in their schools. I think we took the best from all countries.

We had good, innocent, childish kind of fun while we were away. There was no complicated adult crap; we just played the whole time and I really enjoyed it. We didn't have the pressures of normal life looming over us. You studied, and then you could just play. We were just like children the whole time. And for me, it was good because I had a boyfriend and there were no politics involved. It was very clear that I loved him very much. It was just friendship and no pressure involved.

When I was living in Australia I felt like I had a lot to give, but maybe all the energy I had wasn't being given to friends and people as much as it could have been because I was living so solitary. I wanted to be in a position where I could meet lots of people and get to know them and just be Rebecca on her own, not Rebecca and Shane, or Shane and Rebecca. I could just do whatever I liked. I felt really like just me, and it was very nice.

But I always knew I wanted to go back for what I had, absolutely.

School's in

Rebecca smiles, knowingly, when I point out to her that she has not yet mentioned anything about university life in Sweden. This has emerged as a regular pattern with the participants in this study. It makes me realise that the essence of their overseas experience is not determined by the 'vehicle' of that experience – the university exchange.

*The way they do it is so different. They're not so hierarchical. It's nice to be in amongst everyone. Everyone sort of interacts at the same level and you have full access to staff. There's no 'us' and 'you'; it's like a together thing and they **want** to know what you think – they're interested in that. It's not that people here aren't interested in what you think, it's just that you don't need to be standing there with a text book in your third year to have an opinion. When you express an opinion, they'll say, "Oh, that's interesting." They look at you as an independent adult who is going to steer their own learning. Which is how the Swedes are with their kids. You see them in the street. They chat with their kids. It's not, "Oh, here's my five year old who's just come shopping with me – pain in the bum." Like, they'll talk about products on the shelves in supermarkets – I couldn't understand much of what they were saying – but you could hear them joining words and simply chatting with their kids. It's amazing to see.*

And your assignments aren't the same as everyone else. Questions are open to interpretation and the staff are excited about a different perspective. You don't have to be a doctor to spout something. You are just allowed to think differently. I think in Sweden they respect that because that is where all the big ideas in the world have come from – people who are thinking different things to everyone else. The staff are really innovative and exciting to be around. You can tell that they are happy to be there and that they are doing what they love. And all the students are there because they want to be, and they're studying what they want to study and they're doing it for free, so the pressures of passing and failing and repeating are not the same. They are free to just enjoy their learning. I think that is so impressive. Until I went away, I thought the way we did it here was how it was done everywhere else.

Rebecca's last comment indicates a genuine move in cultural perspective from ethnocentric to ethnorelative (M. Bennett, 1993).

Rebecca studied two units in Sweden – ‘Drama and Storytelling’ and ‘Sports Psychology’. ‘Drama and Storytelling’ was *a bit too fluffy* for her; she was *fairytaled out by the end*. But, she recognised its benefits, claiming it was *a good thing to do* as it *really pushed [her] as a person, right out of [her] comfort zone* because it involved friends coming to watch her perform in plays. She enjoyed ‘Sports Psychology’ more, it being *more academic – a really tough subject*, and one that fed her interest in psychology. As well as *wanting to have fun in Sweden*, it was important to Rebecca to *do [her] best with [her] study and not slack off*. As evidence of this commitment, she stayed in her room and worked on Sports Psychology assignments, 9-5, *Monday to Friday* for the three weeks before Shane came to visit.

The good, the bad and the ugly: Memories of Europe

Rebecca has many fun and interesting stories to share about her travels through Europe; they are fond memories. Yet, she now considers some of these memories, in view of her ex-partner’s involvement, *tainted*.

It was my birthday and my friends said, “Let’s go to Copenhagen.” It was just unreal. My mum asked when she rang, “What did you do for your birthday?” I replied, “Oh, just popped over to Copenhagen!” So, we just popped over the bridge to another country and it was just really beautiful. I had probably one of the best birthdays I will ever have. It was completely different to anything I have ever done. Where we ended up was quite accidental. We had just arrived and needed something to eat, so we found a bakery, got some lunch and sat at the waterside and then a jazz band started playing. The sun was shining and it was just a magic day for me. It felt special because Emily and Liesel were there. There were people doing funny, cute things on their boats and there were some very handsome men sitting across the way. They don’t really do men in Sweden; they’re all metro men that are really sensitive and in touch with themselves. We went to Denmark and it was like, “Oh, this is where the real men are!”

I didn’t miss home at all, or worry about it. I mean, I would have loved Shane to be there. You feel like you are half experiencing some things sometimes because your partner is not there to validate it. But I thought, “I’m doing this. This is really good.” And I was with a lot of people that I was really close to.

We went to Germany to Liesel’s family for Christmas, and to Switzerland to Tomas’s family’s chalet in the mountain for New Year. The whole crew came, and my brother and cousin. It was like a bit of a holiday family onslaught! Switzerland was the most amazing thing I have

ever seen in my life – the snow – it’s so romantic. We went hiking over a mountain to this restaurant at the top of a hill. We had a beautiful lunch and watched the snow storm blow up a valley. It was concerning us a bit – about getting home – because it was nearly blizzard conditions. But the mountains and the snow were so beautiful. We were doing angels and having such a good time. It was just amazing. It was surreal. And the toilet was a drop toilet, but you opened the door and looked out and you had the best view. The snow’s coming down and you’re looking at the Alps and people are tobogganing past. The night sky is bright and beautiful. It doesn’t get more perfect than that. It was a picture perfect Christmas and New Year.

Rebecca’s eyebrows suddenly furrow.

But the whole thing feels tainted now. It gets overshadowed because my emotions become involved. I soon realised that I was sleeping with someone who had been with someone else, and who was lying to my face. It was humiliating. I had painted this picture of this amazing man, and we were all so excited for weeks before he came. We even threw a “Welcome here, Shane party” and welcomed him with open arms. Liesel said, “I welcomed him into my home over Christmas and look what he’d done. He was in my chalet.” And my friend Tomas said, “He stayed in my chalet, he stayed in my parents’ house, and he put on all this pretence.” They treated him like they treated me, and I suppose he didn’t deserve it. I felt embarrassed and responsible. I blamed myself and I felt very guilty. But I am over that phase, let me tell you that! It was bloody horrible. I don’t know what to say, but the best thing is that the Germans, I have found, and the Swiss people, in particular, have beautiful manners and are very understanding. They were like, “Just don’t even try to apologise.” But I felt bad because I was the one who had invited him and brought him along and because he was attached to me there is humiliation in that. But I’m very proud of how I was. I was very dignified through the whole thing. I didn’t once yell, or name call. No public slanging and no burning of clothes! But I am coming to terms with it and you can’t help what happened.

She stares out the window for a long time, lost in thought. Finally, she whispers.

And the strange part is, and I don’t know why I do, but I do, I can see how good those things were and as the pain wears off it will get better and better. I do worry that Shane was unable to enjoy his time away because he was walking around bearing guilt the whole time, and he behaved like a guilty person, in retrospect. I worry that he wouldn’t have got as much out of it as I did. He doesn’t deserve to, but it’s a shame really because I can see that it was fabulous.

Other explorations of Europe towards the end of the exchange were equally emotionally challenging for Rebecca. Two days after the break-up, Rebecca and Shane, along with her brother and partner, visit Stockholm for two days. She describes it as a *miserable* time. The fulfilment of this expensive, prepaid trip was justified by Rebecca: *I thought, “Well, we can stay here [Malmö] and sulk and fight, or we can go somewhere and just be distracted and try to get along.” So, that’s what we did. I was in shock. In retrospect, I should have just flown home. In the end it was too much for me – the last couple of nights Shane was meant to be in Sweden I sent him to Copenhagen. I said, “This is too hard for me. You need to disappear now.”*

Rebecca’s final European ‘holiday’ highlights the value for sojourners of a “decompression chamber” prior to re-entry – a short term stay somewhere between the host culture and the home culture (Weaver, 1994, p. 235).

On the way home I spent a week in London with Liesel. It was fantastic to hear English again! I knew what was going on around me! We did heaps of fun touristy things and it’s funny ‘cos it was like all the pain was sitting on top of me, but underneath, I was thinking, “This is really great; I really love this.” It was under there, but the weight of the disaster sort of pushed in on top of it. We did a tour down the Thames and went to Greenwich and we went to see ‘The Lion King’ musical – I cried all the way though that. But when I look back now, it was a really good week even though it was miserable. I look back and think, “Gee, I had a really nice time there.”

Everyone at home wanted me to come straight back as soon as they heard what had happened. But I knew the week in London would be beneficial – a bit of a break, brace myself. It’s a winner.

Bittersweet goodbyes

Rebecca rues stolen opportunities with friends during her final week in Sweden.

The break-up with Shane happened in the very last part of my time away. I sort of felt a bit responsible for him. He was hanging his head in shame because our story was pretty public. He didn’t fit in anywhere and he was in a really interesting position because he was in a country where he didn’t know anyone and the person who is meant to love him most...

Rebecca leaves the sentence hanging, unable to find the words she needs.

I felt responsible to entertain him. I felt responsible for him. Even after what he'd done, I felt responsible for him.

It was very hard saying goodbye to my friends. I just didn't care. Like, at that point your whole life...you know...it's like a divorce. I was just devastated, basically. Just coping, I think. Just surviving. I feel like the end was really tainted. I even resented having been there for some reason. I didn't regret going; I just resented it. I don't know why. I felt bitter towards it and I didn't want to think about it. Not just the last few weeks...I can't really explain it because I don't really know myself, but I didn't regret going away – as a matter of fact, I was even more happy that I went, but I just resent that my last memories of Malmö, which I loved so much, were tainted with this revolting thing. And all my friends who were still there – who were still weeks away from leaving – all knew what had happened and we all went into crisis mode together instead of relaxing and drinking and being ok. I feel bad because it was the last they knew of me. These are friends I'm going to keep for the rest of my life and the last thing they think of me is, "Poor old, Rebecca." I hate that. I couldn't give to the friends I had made in the last few days like I wanted to. It was very awkward for everyone at the end.

I am not going to regret going away. I think you can look at it in two ways – staying and having gone through a break-up and not having had all that extra enrichment in your life, or you can think of going and having the break-up. I am far better to have gone, than I am to have stayed.

I see it as an extreme privilege – to be sponsored really, to go and represent your uni and get to see the world. I put it in a special box with a big green bow on it. Something that for the rest of my life I am going to be proud that I did. Something you can tell your kids about...hopefully, if I get to have children.

Rebecca's language helps me gain an insight into the emotional impact of the relationship breakdown. She refers to the *humiliating* nature of the *disaster*, the *revolting thing* that has *devastated* her and *tainted* her experience. More intriguing to me, however, is her clear determination to reframe the experience in terms of its inherent benefits.

Being home

Rebecca, cocooned in familiarity, is initially relieved to be home: *when I flew over Sydney I thought, "Oh, I forgot how excellent this place is." I was very excited, the sun was shining*

and I just wanted to get out of the plane and meet people. All my family and friends were there, just waiting for me to get home because they knew I would soon be on the skids. She revels in the previously unappreciated beauty of her natural environment: when I got home to my parents' house I got out of the car at the bottom of the driveway and walked the rest of the way. I could smell the eucalyptus and the dog was frolicking down the path towards me. I thought, "Oh, this is what I love." Full sun. T shirts and shorts.

Yet, challenging family relationships – intricately related to her break-up – quickly moderate this sense of relief at being home. In her first six months home, Rebecca's life is dominated by re-establishing and renegotiating relationships.

Living in suspension

Rebecca's living conditions are an explicit reminder of, and therefore exacerbate the pain associated with, her break-up.

After two months

I have had to move in with my parents which is a bit of a rude shock after eight years. I had no job, no car, nowhere to live and uni hadn't started. Shane had been supporting me and I didn't have a job, so...sorry.

Rebecca pauses to stem the flow of tears.

We agreed when we were in Sweden that Shane would stay where we had been living together and I would go to my parents; he really had nowhere else to go. Of course I was going to be shocked about having to live with my parents. That's what it's like when you're 26 and you're all grown up and living with your parents. They've been so supportive and so kind. They thought food and wine would fix everything, and I haven't had to lift a finger. But it's been both positive and negative because I don't feel like I'm being a grown-up and living. It's like being on holiday – I'm terribly spoilt – but I feel really positive about doing my own washing and cooking my own food – doing it my way – and I haven't been able to because I've been living in their home. They've wanted to do it for me. I feel like I've been living in suspension.

After four months

It is the emotional environment in her parents' home that seems to be causing most distress for Rebecca.

I would describe my father as a bit of an emotional cripple. I knew exactly what he would say about the whole infidelity thing: "Well, when you said you were going away I thought, 'Hmmm, probably not the best idea.' I just don't know why you think it would be ok to leave your man at home and jet off around the world. A lot of men would do what he did, and I think you should just keep an open mind. I think I wouldn't have gone in the first place if I were you." I just looked at him and said, "Well, I would expect that from you and there are a lot of reasons why you would say something like that." It's about the way he views women; it's a generational thing, I'm sure. Women live for their men – that's his scheme of things. He was very hurtful, very, very hurtful. But I expected it, so I could take it on the chin.

I wonder to what extent the last sentence is just 'words'. Her pride and dignity are tangibly apparent, but so is her deep hurt.

It's also about his loyalty to my ex-partner. He still sends text messages to Shane and phones him and I get irritated by the fact that my ex will pursue that with dad. My father is so emotionally involved in that relationship. He just wants everything to be back to normal. He would never have been more happy than if the relationship didn't end and he would be 'super proud dad'. For me, it's pretty tough. Living with my dad is sort of like living with two different people. We don't talk about the break-up. I am not to say anything negative about my ex in front of dad. We only talk about the good stuff that happened while I was away and the people I got to know and the fun I had. I think even a part of him was incredibly proud to have an intrepid traveller for a daughter. But I just do not talk to him about how I feel because he won't accept it. Mum and I are extremely close, and I talk about everything with my friends, but with dad – go with the positive stuff. The deep and meaningful – don't bother. I have had a lifetime with my father, so even though it's not nice, I knew what to expect. He dealt with it in another way. He would say, "This is what I think, but you're my child and I love you. I don't like to see you hurt and I am going to do everything I can to make you feel better."

Rebecca sobs audibly. I find it difficult to prevent tears welling in my own eyes. She pulls tissues from the box I slide towards her.

And he really did care for me in his own way – cooking for me, looking after me, sitting with me while I studied so I wouldn't have to be on my own. So, he looked after me, but I always knew that underneath that was his opinion. He will support me and love me and can't bear to see me in any kind of pain – particularly coming home from such a good experience – but I

*still know there is an undercurrent. This is a really big issue for me. I **knew** I was going to get that from him and I refused to regret going away and I refused to resent having left, no matter what he said. So, for the first couple of months after I came home, I just pushed the whole thing, the whole having been away thing, into little boxes – A,B,C,D,E,F – and then gradually, as I felt ready, I opened the lid off each one.*

As evidence of this progressive ‘healing’, Rebecca shares a story about her friend’s photo album.

One of the girls who went to Sweden with us – Sally – made a photo album of our time there. There were some shots of how we lived. Just last week I had finally gotten to the point where I could look at it and go, “Wow, that was so cool.” I can now look back at all the fun we had and how good it was.

Her relationship with the other exchange girls is a source of great emotional support during her re-entry. The benefit of such support during re-entry is a long-standing finding from research (see, for example, Lank, 1985; Bossard & Peterson, 2005).

I talk about everything with my friends, especially Emily, Sarah and Sally – some of the other girls who came away with me from this uni. So, I haven’t really felt the need to overdo the talking about the experience with other people. My parents were pretty keen to see my pictures; they loved them. I emailed some of my other friends while I was away, and, as they’ve shown interest – you can tell when someone is really interested or not – I will talk to them about it and show them pictures. I picked this up from my brother when he came home. He was really careful about showing his photos and talking too much because he experienced people who came home from overseas and started talking like crazy people about doing something on a beach somewhere and people who hadn’t had that same experience were completely bored by it. They didn’t do it and they didn’t want to listen to someone carry on like a pork chop about it. But I’m happy to keep it for myself and talk about it with the people I experienced it with. The other girls and I often laugh about things. We did lots of things together; it’s a shared experience.

I’ve been pretty low key about the whole thing. When I first got back, people weren’t interested in what I did when I was away; they just wanted to gossip about the break-up. This was the line I heard a thousand times: “Did you have a good time when you were away? Good, good. Now, what about the break-up?”

Outside my office window the wind howls relentlessly. Rain beats against the glass. It is an unusually violent start to the Easter break. Rebecca, in contrast, sits in quiet contemplation. It is something I have come to respect in her – carefully thought-through responses.

Part of moving on for me and, I think, moving on from coming home, will be moving in with my best friend. The plan is to do this in the next couple of weeks. I will have independence from my father 'cos I feel like I live under him a little bit – he can look at me like this silly little girl who left. As I've gotten older and dealt with this relationship, I realise that praise from my father isn't gratifying. What he thinks is good and what I think is good are two different things. He's a "told you so" kind of person and that's where he gets his strength or power in the relationship – to be managing you and putting you where a woman should be. I don't want him to feel like he has any influence or power over me. While I am still at home I feel like he is managing me.

So, all of this is directly linked up with having been away and the whole experience of coming home because the dominant message I have been getting from my father is that I got what I deserved for being away. Obviously, it would have been nicer to come back and none of that had happened.

The whole infidelity thing took the shine off coming home. It takes the shine off me being able to look at the memory so soon, objectively, and not feel stupid – stupid for having gone.

This is the first hint of her self-professed *self-bashing*.

I'm sure that's not something I am going to wear forever. Like, I look back and think of all the fun things I did, but it's taken me a while to allow myself to do that because I didn't want to be thinking, "Oh, that day I was cycling to and from water aerobics, and we went out drinking that night or whatever, well, on the other side of the world my partner was cheating on me. How silly was I." But I don't want to be like that, so, like I said, I'm putting them in boxes and opening them up when I can deal with them.

Rebecca finds some consolation in *talk[ing] candidly about the shock of being back in family politics* with her brothers, one of whom returned from a three year overseas sojourn, just one month after her. During uncomfortable situations with their parents, she claims that they would *just look at each other, and without saying anything, just [know] what [they] were each thinking*. She is able to reflect on some light-hearted moments.

I feel like I'm pretty adaptive from having lived with all those people overseas, and I'm generally quite an easy-going person, so I can cope. There are some things that I laugh about, like mum's obsessive compulsive disorder over her bench. She wipes it, then wipes it again. There's no point in me wiping it because it won't be wiped in the manner that it should be wiped! And the fridge is always full of 'off' things – it doesn't matter how many things I take out. This is a little project my brother and I started when he came home. He's a chef, so when he looked in the fridge he was appalled. We made a dual project. We worked as a team. Everyday when we opened the fridge, we took something out and threw it away. I chose one thing to throw out; he chose one thing to throw out. But we both realised this was never going to change! It was good for a while, but my brother left and I have been a bit busy, so I've given up on the project. But while we were there we had good fun.

After six months

Rebecca's relationship break-up still features strongly in her conversation, albeit less emotionally, six months later.

I'm so sick of other people trying to decide whether it was me going away that caused the break up. There's a whole spectrum of opinions on that. I feel like one of Skinner's rats. You get an opportunity like that; you love someone or you don't. I wanted to do it, so I never doubted the fact that me wanting to leave said that I didn't love him. It meant that I wanted to experience some of the world, and he got to enjoy that in the end, too. So, I never saw it as a thing just for me. I saw it as something for both of us; I saw it as a fast track to travel for both of us. But I think it was different in other people's eyes. They had a different perception. They didn't know how Shane and I viewed it together.

*I'm living away from home now, so I don't feel like I'm under the opinion or ideas or notions of someone else. I can't figure out words for it – you live with your parents and you feel like you are under their expectations and they have an element, or **feel** they have an element, of control of you and how you are as a person. You move out and start operating independently. This is my life now and I feel better about that altogether.*

I have always been unashamedly myself and I won't alter for anyone, but I still get pressure to be other things. Like, my mum's got a 'Rebecca box' and if I operate outside of it she says "Oh, you wouldn't do that!" Not in your world I wouldn't do it – not in the world I tell you about!

Rebecca is now, two months after our last interview, less visibly traumatised. She is able to reflect more objectively on the situation. She is less egocentric in her interpretation of events and behaviour – able to see how other people have been affected by the situation, not just her. She still seeks and articulates positive outcomes of both the exchange and the break-up as a counter-balance to the negatives. She is determined to reframe her life experience positively. There is no sign of *self-bashing*.

I think it's important to give yourself time to realise how you feel about the exchange before you start talking about it. Let it sink in a bit.

I still keep in contact with my friends, closely – it's really important to me. If you don't keep any of the friends, what else have you got from the experience? In the future, I'm not going to remember the great Sports Psychology assignment I did, am I? I've got the five coolest friends in the world from the exchange. And, it's important not to be afraid to be the first one to reach out. If you send the first three letters, don't worry about it. You might get one back eventually, and it will be very rewarding. Something I learnt while I was away, definitely – is that communication isn't 'you give me' and then 'I give you'. It's like you can give, give, give, then you might get a bit, then a bit more. It doesn't have to be, "I called you last time."

I've been talking with my friends around the world the last few days. I sent my friend Liesel three photos of when we were away. When she saw them she said she thought that I would be able to hear her laughing from the other side of the world. She could relate to the photos straight away. It was just really, really nice.

I don't think a lot of men of my father's generation think that women should put a backpack on and just drift over the world and do what they want when they've got a man at home they should be prioritising. That is just how people were raised. We were all really going through a rough time; it wasn't just me that suffered out of the whole bust up. That's just how my father tried to make sense of it for himself. People have differences in the way they do things. And that has altered a bit now anyway because of the way things become clearer as time goes on. I am ever so glad I went overseas, even more so because of the break-up, because it changed my life, and almost really saved my life. I've got so many brilliant friends all over the world. It was hard for me to celebrate it at the time. I would say I probably celebrate it a bit more now. Like my brother said, it turned me back on as a person. But I think that when you go through something like that it switches you back on as a person. I don't think you can live properly if you don't accept and go through the crappy things, too.

Uni – prescribed, not negotiated

Completing a university degree provides Rebecca with a legitimate distraction from her relationship woes and the concomitant challenges of re-entry. It gives her life meaning, purpose and a sense of direction. Yet, her university degree is also a source of frustration for her; the style and structure of university learning in Tasmania is very different Sweden – a difference she finds hard to reconcile.

After four months

*I get frustrated with the way we do uni here compared to how they do it in Sweden – how **not** negotiable we are here. The hierarchy and the rules and the inflexibility make me really cross. We are so formal. I loved uni over there; it was a breeze. It was the way I would like to do it here. In Sweden, they would change the course material if you didn't like it. They can set a course and you can say, "Well, I reckon you're doing a bit too much of 'this' and we're more interested in you making the course more of 'this', and they'd do it. That's normal. They don't even bat an eyelid. You haven't insulted their intellectual property, or whatever you call it. They are just like, "Oh, yeah, I can see why you would like to do that. Let's talk to the rest of the class." What you need isn't being prescribed; what you need is being negotiated.*

Emily has been unwell lately and I believe she's been done a bit of an injustice and I'm very unhappy about it. It's about the failure of an assignment and no option to resubmit. I really want to go in to bat for her, but you have to be careful in your fourth year. I am a realist and I don't want to upset the wrong people at this point in my career.

As an Education Faculty we are getting better; I have noticed lots of improvements, but I think we could be more innovative in the way our degrees are structured and how we deliver it and how we teach people about it. I think there are people who should be sitting down in a forum with us – the people who went away – asking, "How do you think we can do it better?" But they haven't, which is really interesting. They have had an opportunity to see how it is done elsewhere, and maybe learn from it. Maybe they do know and they just can't do anything about it. Maybe I am assuming they don't know, when maybe they do.

*I don't feel devalued by this; I feel value-added because I can take my experience with me into the classroom. Give the kids the resources and the idea and let them work with it themselves, and do it with them, not tell them, dictate. I like to **do** things and learn **with** the kids, which is how the lecturers did it with us in Sweden. Like a partnership. It absolutely worked.*

After six months

While the completion of her university degree has provided a much-needed focus for Rebecca over recent months, she is, perversely, worried by what that completion potentially means for her.

I have found the end of semester a bit of an anti-climax. I don't know – this could have something to do with it – but whenever we achieved something while we were away, there were 10 people to go, “Yay!” and get carried away over it. There were always milestones like, “Oh, we’ve finished this assignment” or “It’s your birthday.” Just celebrating for nothing, really. I thought making the end of this semester would be like this massive achievement for me, but it has been a kind of anti-climax. I’m not sure why. We all thought we were a little bit ‘cleverer’ passing uni over there – that might have been it. At the beginning of the semester I thought I would feel excellent for getting through to the end, but now it’s here it just feels like, “Well, so you bloody well should.” You just get on with it. Think to the end of one thing, and then, right, next thing, and then do that. I am concerned about when it’s all over and I don’t have a purpose anymore, or daily pressure. That will be frightening. I will be desperate for relief work. I will want to work straight away.

Changed self – the ‘real me’

Rebecca reflects on how she’s changed since her exchange and her relationship break-up. She recognises changes in personality, attitude and behaviour.

After two months

Rebecca’s attitude towards her physical environment is one of the first changes she recognises.

When I’m walking outside, especially after it has rained, I make a point of appreciating the smell. When we were away we didn’t see many stars in the night sky. So now, at night, I will often go outside and appreciate the beautiful stars and night sky. I love it when it’s really bright outside from the moon. I didn’t realise how much I appreciated those things till I got home. I always stop to look at it now.

She has also developed a more perceptive awareness of other people’s behaviour.

When I first got back I remember thinking that the voices were really harsh and loud – so loud. I had no idea of the perception of what Australians were like – loud-wise – before I went away. The things that we will do and say in public are completely different to other

parts of the world. I do notice things and people around me more now, definitely – people's manners in public, especially. One part of me knows that I will soon be fitting right back into that, but another part of me doesn't think I fit in with that anymore.

Life's pretty good now. It's busy and, ah, I suppose I am enjoying my whole new life here. It doesn't feel like ordinary life to me because obviously the life I am living now is completely different to my old one before I left. So, everything is new and different. Yep. I am excited about life now, at the moment. I look at it as an opportunity for a new start.

Rebecca is resolute in her desire to be optimistic. Yet, her use of the words 'suppose' and 'opportunity', suggests that her attitude is more one of 'learned optimism' (Seligman, 1991) than default positioning.

When I first got home, I was relieved. I was relieved to get back to my family and friends. I'm lucky I've got them. It was nice to stop living out of my backpack, have clean sheets all the time and a nice soft bed. But I also felt that until uni started and until I got my new part-time job, I was in limbo a little bit. I soon got sick of that! I think it took two weeks of lying in the sun with trashy novels on the back lawn at my parents' house for me to say, "Ok, I need stuff to do. I need uni and I need a job and I need my life. Or just start whatever it is I am going to start!"

I tend to live in each day more – just do every day, one day at a time. I don't focus so much on what is happening in the future and what I have to execute. I don't know why – that's just how it is.

Rebecca's coping strategy is in direct contrast to Lynette whose future orientation was instrumental in her re-entry adjustment.

I'm a different person now because I want to fit more into every day. I have more time for my friends now. I'm not tired all the time when I get home. I don't want to sit in front of the TV and eat my dinner and just go to sleep. I'm like, "Where are all the people?" I make a whole lot more effort with my friends now. TV – what's that? I used to watch a bit of TV before I went away because you get boxed into your lifestyle and your 9-5 routine. I didn't have a TV when I was in Sweden and I'm not sure that I want one now I am back. I definitely have a lot more energy and I want to do stuff and experience even just Tasmania. I want to do more, even if it is just some nights we go to the pub and have just one drink and sit and talk and come home. I am going to do those things with my friends now because I did them with

people I met over there and I enjoyed it and I want to be able to share that kind of thing with my friends. You just have to live. You start executing life more effectively.

The Germans, I noticed, are just never at home. They are always going out and meeting each other for coffee. Once I would have thought, "Oh God, half an hour drive, sit at a café, have coffee with somebody, drive home – that's a bit of an effort." No, that's what it's about. It's what life is about. It's just like my brother said to me before I left, "It will reawaken you."

When I first came back I was a bit frustrated because I couldn't see the people that I had grown to love. I miss having people around all the time. People think it's weird, but I'll go and stay at Emily's house and I don't sleep in the spare room. I sleep in her room and her boyfriend is like, "Why?" Well, why would you have a sleepover if you can't talk to each other until you fall asleep? I know it's for teenagers, but the things we might perceive in everyday life as a bit weird or strange or inappropriate were things that we could do in Malmö and nobody cared.

After four months

Rebecca reflects on how she's changed since coming home. The trauma associated with her break-up has helped her put other things in her life in perspective.

The world feels very small and that is exciting and scary as well. I don't feel insignificant in the world anymore. I realise that I'm linked to this person, here and here, and if I want to, I can go here and here and teach. I feel like maybe before I was a little bit ignorant to it. I just feel really different, just switched on. I feel like the world is open to me now. I'm a lot more relaxed than I was before I left. I have things more in perspective now. Also, things don't wind me up. It could be a number of things that have influenced that. You know, I've done the worst; I've had it. I know I'm not untouchable or unhurttable, but now it's like, "Bring it on!" It has helped me at work. Like, when the waitress and the manager are busy and get a bit snakey, I just work as hard as I can to get the job done and I always come out on top. I am just doing what I can, and that's how I look at things now. You just gotta do what you can do, to the best of your ability, and if things don't work out, well, you can always try again. You know, it's just time, and what's that?

I can't help but reflect, as an almost fifty year old, on the reckless ease with which so many young people dismiss the significance of time. I have no doubt I was the same at 26.

*I'm aware of the same old thing happening in my friends' lives. You know, you turn up on the back door step to say hello and it's the same patterns. It's a bit boring, you know, all a bit boring. One friend of mine, in particular, I feel incredibly sorry for her. I think she may be in a rut and she's not even aware of it herself because she's upset a lot of the time. Just the same old things, things I was doing before I left that I have now stopped. I look at somebody else doing them and I think, "I don't want to do those things again. I am not going to live like that again." I am definitely resisting going back to old ways. I look at her and what she's doing and think, "I wish you could just put your kid in a backpack and go off and have a look at something different." It's like people accept their life and the struggle when it doesn't have to be like that. But you have to be very careful about how you come across when you come home: you can sound arrogant, like you know more than you actually do. I just know that's a model of what I **don't** want to do.*

*I also have a better ability to see things from other people's perspectives and understand their motivations a bit better. This is probably because of the mixed culture we lived in. For example, **every** time Australians walk in a room they'll say, "G'day", even if they have seen each other ten times that day. Germans will say hello once to you in the morning and if you walk into a room later on, they won't say hello again. It's not being impolite, it's just that they don't see the point of continually saying hello. I was talking to my German friend about this and she said, "Do you find that rude about us?" I said, "No, it's just how you are." Then I asked, "Do we annoy you?" and she said, "Well, it is just how you are." So we just needed to adapt and now I'm really flexible.*

I haven't really had my own space since I got home – at all. I've got one room in my parents' house, that's it. It's not even really my room – it doesn't even have my doona, you know. I've got my stuff crammed in the cupboard and all my possessions are in boxes. So, yeah, I'm flexible. I don't need much. I realise how little I need. It's pretty exciting when you realise how little you need in life. Five or six years ago I suspected I was like this. Now I am just like this! I actually used to say, "I don't need much to be happy", but my family and friends would all say, "But you've got heaps! Look at your house and your life. It's easy to say that when you've got everything you could possibly want."

So, yeah, I feel a lot better within myself. I suppose I know a lot more about me now. I think, I feel, just incredibly empowered by it all.

After six months

Rebecca continues, after six months, to compare her lifestyle in Sweden with her life in Tasmania. She still consciously attempts to recreate those aspects of Swedish life that she found attractive. The word *flexible* is mentioned numerous times by Rebecca, not only in relation to its attractiveness in terms of lifestyle, but also in terms of its perceived impact on her personality.

Life is really busy at the moment, and good. I am happy with it and I am pleased with how my friendships are being maintained with the people I met overseas. I feel kind of proud and special for having those. All the people I wanted to stay in contact with, I have.

It feels completely different now to how I lived in Sweden. Sometimes I get, not cranky, but I think, "Oh God I wish I was as flexible now as I was when I was away." Like having cups of tea with friends at a café in Sweden at 10 o'clock at night felt like nothing; it was normal there. But here, everyone is at home and ready for bed – going back to normal life. The thing that bothers me is how rigid we are on 9 – 5, and after 8 p.m. you don't go visiting. In Sweden we visited people any time of the night we wanted to. So, I keep telling myself that I need to do things differently now. I want to keep some of the old habits from Sweden, but it is a bit tough. Emily and I manage to do things like that every now and then. Most other people haven't done it before, but the ones who have are more than happy to do it. Like Sarah – she came away with us too – I have called her sometimes at 6:30 (which is the time I would normally have knocked on her door in Sweden) and say, "Do you want to come for dinner?" She'd be, "Yeah, be there in ten." It just feels normal to us, whereas here, most people would normally plan that a week in advance.

This could just be because it is a bit of a new issue in my life at the moment, but when I was away I had lots of male friends and it wasn't ever considered a 'date'. Not sure if it's a European thing or Scandinavian – I don't know. It was absolutely ok if a guy said, "Do you want to go for a coffee on Thursday?" It was like a mates thing. I could do it three or four times a week and there was nothing read into it. But over here, if someone asks you out for a drink, it would be, "Ooohhh! What's going on there?" There is no hope in hell of getting people over here to understand that and you can't go to the pub here and say, "Right, overseas they do it this way and this is how I am doing it here." That frustrates me and I think maybe while I was there I took it for granted a bit and it wasn't until I got home that I realised, "Hey, I like that."

The frustration that Rebecca experiences in relation varying values echoes that unearthed in, *inter alia*, Gullahorn's and Gullahorn's (1963) seminal study of returnees.

While cognisant of genuine changes in her personality, Rebecca is, at the same time, acutely aware of the fragility that surrounds her emotions on occasions. Her short-term goal focus is one way she attempts to protect herself from this vulnerability.

*I have my good and my bad days. Let me tell you, yesterday wasn't a flash day. But I don't get as wound up about things now; I'm as cool as a cucumber. I bought a laptop off my friend in Brisbane on the weekend – got it cheap, a really good deal – and he re-imaged it and then the password wouldn't work and when I left in the morning I was meant to bring it with me, but I couldn't log on. We didn't know what was wrong with it and normally that would have **really** made me cross and thrown me and irritated me all day. But I just said, "Oh well, you'll fix it and post it." I was as calm as anything. I just didn't care. Six or seven months ago **that would have really annoyed me**. You know, "That computer wouldn't work and it is always like that for me. Just my luck." My response surprised the friends I was with. I was also shocked about how calm I was. I used to be able to predict how I would react to things, but now I can't. It is different to how I might have expected. I think something has changed in me and I don't know what it is. It doesn't matter what you do – sometimes things just don't work out. I'm more willing to accept that now, I think. There's always another way you can fix it. I don't feel like there is anything you can't doctor up or fix in the end. It might not be the best case scenario, but you can't have the best scenario all the time.*

I think this change started to happen while I was away. I think I had to become pretty flexible living with a lot of other people and maybe it started with small things and moved up to bigger things. I've just got perspective now about what really matters. If I get my laptop today or in five days from now I am going to cope some way. If my cake burns on the bottom, then my cake burns on the bottom. People burn cakes everywhere in the world, why get your blood pressure up? There are big things in life that will upset you, so don't let the little things bother you. When you've got something else going on that's pretty big, little things pale in comparison. Obviously my disaster happened while I was away, so I think maybe it could have been to do with that. Everything fell apart while I was away, so, sitting and waiting an hour for a train – I didn't give a rat's bum, to be quite honest. If I miss a plane that might cost me a hundred dollars, so what? Life is so much bigger than the hundred dollars and the missed plane. I notice how wound up other people get about things that are just trivial. And people snapping at each other – I don't get it. I did have a feeling, five or six years ago, that I

wasn't meeting my relaxed potential, like I wasn't who I was needing, or meant, to be. I don't remember the last time I had an argument, I really don't.

I still do one day at a time. Not good for getting assignments done on time! I still just really do short-term goals. What people call short-term goals, I call long term goals. Just finish the degree. I'm hoping it's an ongoing thing because I think it makes life more fun. Just looking at the little bit and living it everyday. I have always wanted to do that but because of my lifestyle I got overwhelmed with the big picture. Why think about the next 20 or 50 years when you can just be loving the day and the next 20 minutes.

Final words

Coming home is such an emotional time – re-uniting with your family. Having an incubation time is so important because, at some point, living overseas stops being like a holiday. Having a little holiday – some time out – before you come home gives you time to mentally prepare for it. I read all this stuff about reverse culture shock before I left; I even gave it to my brother to read. There was something about psychological theories and I even said to Shane that I thought he experienced one of the things they described – that when you leave, the people you leave behind grieve and then when they stop grieving a bit and they get used to it, they don't know what they feel anymore. They sort of get confused about it. They grieve not having you there, then they realise they can do without you and then they're confused. I think Shane was a victim to a lot of those things.

I remember when I told Shane about it, he was just shocked. He said, "Oh my God! I have. I did do that." I said, "Yes. I was aware of it and you weren't. I wish I had told you."

The exchange is probably the most life-changing thing that ever happened to me – for a number of reasons. I feel pride because I did it and survived.

As Rebecca leaves this final interview she is quite emotional. It is a bookend for our first interview. She hands me an envelope before she steps outside the door. I wait until she leaves to open it. Inside the envelope is a card inscribed with her handwriting: *What started out as something designed to help you, ended up helping me. Thank you.* Now I am quite emotional.

Making meaning

How prior experience affected the re-entry

This was Rebecca's first re-entry experience, an experience dominated by the aftermath of her relationship break-up. It was an overwhelming life-changing event, one that essentially *took the shine off coming home*. In this respect, it is difficult to separate Rebecca's relationship experience from her re-entry experience: they coalesce. In other ways, too, Rebecca's experiences in Sweden paved the way for the distinctive qualities of her re-entry.

Although a Western country with many qualities akin to that of Australia, Rebecca experienced relationships, lifestyle and university study markedly differently when in Sweden. It is these differences that impacted directly, and not always mutually exclusively, on her re-entry experience. In the main, these differences were experienced negatively by Rebecca during her – re-entry, thus stimulating in her, a deliberate attempt to change in terms of attitude and behaviour. In essence, she attempted to replicate in Tasmania what she experienced in Sweden.

Strong, positive and consistent peer relationships dominated Rebecca's Swedish experience. These relationships were formed and maintained primarily through her communal living situation. Despite some of its challenges, like sharing with *rude* and *inconsiderate* people, communal living was something that Rebecca embraced from the beginning of her exchange. She *really enjoyed having someone around all the time*, a situation quite removed from her previous *solitary lifestyle*. She felt intimately connected to others. That she was *bitter* and *resentful* about her incapacity to *give* to her friends during her last days in Sweden was testimony to the value Rebecca placed on their friendship.

Returning to Tasmania to live with her parents was completely appositional to this communal living experience in Sweden. She had lost daily, direct and immediate contact with her friends and was plunged back into the role of daughter, where she felt like she was *under [her parents'] expectations*. Her strong and positive daily relationship with her friends in Sweden, then, had been replaced with, amongst other things, an *undercurrent* of tension and hurt from her father in Tasmania. Her father's reframing, in a negative light, of her exchange experience, added a further layer of distress for Rebecca during her re-entry and essentially expedited the development of coping strategies.

One strategy that Rebecca employed to counter-balance the situation in her parents' home was drawing great strength and support from her brothers and her friends. She felt affirmed

by her brothers in their shared understanding of their parents' idiosyncratic behaviour; she maintained regular email contact with her friends from Sweden (most of whom had returned to their home countries); and met regularly, in and away from university, the other Tasmanian girls who accompanied her on the exchange. These relationship choices confirm the findings of other studies which have shown that regular contact with others who have had previous overseas experience eases some of the difficulties associated with re-entry (Lank, 1985; Raschio, 1987). These varied forms of communication, then, validated for Rebecca the positive outcomes of her exchange, something that stood in stark contrast to her father's repositioning of her experience.

Communication has been highlighted, through previous research studies, as central to relationship readjustment during re-entry (see, for example, Freedman, 1980; Martin, 1986; Smith, 2002a). It has been suggested that, if relationships in the home culture are to be meaningful and enduring after an overseas sojourn, there must be "facilitative" communication (Martin, 1986, p. 19) and an "explicit re-negotiation of what used to be an implicit contract between people" (Freedman, 1980, p. 24). It appears that Rebecca was attempting to sustain meaningful and enduring relationships with her brothers and her friends, specifically, through facilitative communication, but that approach was hindered with her parents – her mother through continuing to place her in her *Rebecca box* and her father through refusing to talk about the breakup and talking only about the *positive stuff* from the exchange. In this sense, there was no re-negotiation of the previous implicit contract between parents and daughter. What remained unsaid essentially charted the path of their future relationship. Unlike the findings from Martin's (1986) seminal study (and others) of re-entry relationships, Rebecca's relationship with her parents was not enhanced. Rebecca's relationship with her parents – her father, in particular – demonstrates clearly the capacity of others to influence a sojourner's re-entry experience. It is, then, not solely individual cognition that influences re-entry adjustment, but social cognition as well. The individual cannot be independent from the social environment of which they are a part. Re-entry is a personal and social phenomenon.

Just as with relationships, the lifestyle that Rebecca adopted in Sweden also contrasted noticeably with her return lifestyle in Tasmania. Sweden offered freedom and flexibility, and welcome *time out* from *complicated adult crap*. Tasmania, by contrast, offered inflexibility, rigid routine and a potential return to *the same patterns*. She was deliberately attempting to maintain many of those aspects of Swedish cultural life that she had grown to enjoy by recreating aspects of her Swedish lifestyle in Tasmania: *I am going to do those things with my friends now because I did them with people I met over there and enjoyed it and I want to be*

able to share that kind of thing with my friends. This was yet another example of Rebecca attempting to validate the positive outcomes of her exchange. Her desire to replicate what she had in Sweden was a clear message that the Swedish lifestyle was, in many ways, somehow ‘better’ than that in Tasmania. In doing so she continued to invalidate her father’s *dominant message* to her that she *got what [she] deserved for going away*. She was uncompromising in refusing to yield any power to her father.

University life provided a further example of difference between Sweden and Tasmania. Rebecca *loved* university in Sweden. In particular, she loved the respect, independence and flexibility that the lecturers afforded the students. By contrast, in Tasmania, the *hierarchy, rules* and *inflexibility* of the university made her *cross* and *frustrated*. She admitted that, until she attended university in Sweden, she believed that *the way we did it here was how it was done everywhere else*. Just as with other aspects of her experience, such as relationships and lifestyle, it wasn’t until she had experienced something different that she could reassess the relative value of her home culture university. In a pattern that emerged very early in the interviews with Rebecca, her coping strategy was to seek the positive – while still able to recognise and articulate the challenges. Thus, she claimed not to feel *devalued* by the situation, but, rather, *value-added*, in the sense that she could emulate many of the things she’d learned to appreciate from the Swedish education system, in her own classroom.

Being a first-time sojourner, it is clear that Rebecca had experienced, for the first time, the notion of cultural identity: that people’s beliefs and behaviours are inextricably tied to their cultural context. It wasn’t until she lived in Sweden that variation in university culture became apparent, for example. It wasn’t until she returned to Tasmania that variation in lifestyle became clearly visible. Her overseas experience, then, provided a contrast never before visible, and concomitantly, fertile ground for consciously managed change.

That Rebecca was attempting to consciously manage her cultural identity, by recreating some of the host culture norms and behaviours in her own culture, indicates that she identified strongly with some aspects of the host culture. Sussman (2000) claims that such attempts to identify with the host culture norms and behaviours – something she terms “additive identity shifts” – tend to correlate with greater difficulty during re-entry (p. 365). This is because, characteristically, these sojourners have undergone strong shifts in cultural identity. In other words, the extent to which their thoughts, feelings and behaviours are determined by the cultural context of which they are a part, is acknowledged, usually for the first time. Yet, there were still elements of her home culture with which Rebecca strongly identified – the

physical environment, for example. She wasn't attempting to disassociate herself completely from her home culture, simply recreate those elements from Sweden that she found attractive.

Although recreating her Swedish lifestyle was clearly logistically challenging for Rebecca, it remained consciously sought. In Rebecca's case, identifying strongly with the host culture values and norms, and attempting to recreate some of them, was empowering as it gave her a sense of control over the quality and direction of her life. She didn't feel that she needed to leave the home culture in order to have her cultural identity confirmed, though – as did one of the other participants in this study – Joseph. Furthermore, identification with the host culture portrayed a dominant message that the exchange experience, if worth replicating in some fashion, was clearly worthwhile, thus invalidating others' perceived negative outcomes of the experience. Rebecca's reframing of events was a constant source of motivation for her throughout her re-entry.

Themes emerging from the narrative

New perspective on old

A new perspective on previously unnoticed, and in some cases, unappreciated aspects of her home culture, characterised the first four months of Rebecca's re-entry. She became consciously aware of culturally embedded behaviours such as *loud* and *harsh voices* and Australians' penchant for saying 'hello' each time they see the same person on the same day. She also became more aware of the beauty of the physical environment. As with Lynette, James and Marie – other participants in this study – Rebecca's appreciation of the physical environment in Australia was ignited when she returned home. She basked, literally and metaphorically, in the full sun and warmth, enjoyed the sound of the cicadas, the smell of the eucalypts and the clarity of the night sky. Interestingly, it was only through loss of this physical environment, and the experience of a different environment, that she learned to appreciate what she had previously taken for granted, or at least had accepted uncritically. *She didn't realise how much [she] appreciated those things until [she] got home.*

For Rebecca, the physical environment was one clear representation of familiarity, a familiarity that she relished and was determined to maintain. Other familiar aspects of her home culture, such as *manners in public*, were less appealing, their familiarity representing and highlighting, rather, those things that Rebecca had, as a result of the exchange, come to dislike. This new awareness of one's own culture has been termed "cultural identity salience" (Sussman, 2000, p. 362). Ironically, it is through leaving one's culture that one comes to understand it better (Weaver, 1998). In Rebecca's case, there seemed to be an emerging

understanding, during her re-entry, of the extent to which previously taken-for-granted attitudes and behaviours are culturally constructed.

Coping strategies

Rebecca's deliberate choice of coping strategies, both affective and cognitive, combined with her self-professed lack of *emotional self-indulgence*, characterised and determined, to a certain extent, many aspects of her re-entry experience. Decades of empirical cross-cultural research have shown that the choice of coping strategy can either facilitate or hinder adjustment (see, for example, Adler, 1981; Berry & Annis, 1974; Cox, 2004). Rebecca's choice of coping strategies clearly facilitated her re-entry adjustment.

Rebecca's coping strategies reflected Lazarus's and Folkman's (1984) categorisation that they can be problem-focussed (managing the environment causing the stress) or emotion-focussed (regulating emotions towards the problem causing the stress). Although Lazarus and Folkman suggest that people tend to select just one strategy, Rebecca demonstrated use of both throughout the first six months of her re-entry. In terms of a problem-focussed approach, she deliberately regulated, for the first couple of months, which aspects of her overseas experience to deal with and when. She had *little boxes* labelled A,B,C,D,E,F, the *lids* of which she *gradually opened*, as she *felt ready*. She broke a large, unmanageable process down into bite-size pieces. This was essentially a protective strategy for Rebecca; it reduced her emotional vulnerability.

The effectiveness of this protective strategy was apparent by the end of the fourth month home when she claimed she could now *look back at all the fun* she had and recognise *how good it was*. After six months home she recognised how difficult it had been for her to *celebrate at the time*. That there had been a clear and discernible development in her ability to manage her stressful situation during the first six months home was most apparent. Yet, she was still aware, after six months, of the importance of having a point of focus as part of her coping strategy. Without some form of 'distraction' from her stressful situation she recognised the potential danger for her mental health: *I am concerned about when [uni] is all over and I don't have a purpose anymore, or daily pressure. That will be frightening. I will be desperate for relief work. I will want work straight away.*

In terms of an emotion-focussed approach, she *refused to regret going away* and *refused to resent having left*. This re-entry attitude marked a strong contrast with her feelings of *resent[ing]* having been in Sweden at the end of her exchange. Her emotion-focussed re-entry coping strategy manifested itself in her reframing events and her attitude so that she sought

and focussed on the positive, rather than the negative aspects of her experience. This was evident from the beginning of her re-entry. For example, after just two months home she could see that *as the pain [wore] off, it [would] get better and better*. She framed the exchange as an *extreme privilege*, something that *for the rest of [her] life* she was going to be *proud of*. Also, although discernibly hurt by her father's attitude and behaviour, she sought to cope by suggesting that she *expected it* and could therefore, *take it on the chin*. Similarly, she opined that *you can't live properly if you don't accept and go through the crappy things, too*.

By the sixth month home she could recognise the ultimate long term benefit of the exchange – and the break-up: *I am ever so glad I went overseas, even more so because of the break-up, because it changed my life, and almost saved my life...and because I've got so many brilliant friends all over the world*. Rebecca's approach is indicative of an internal locus of control – the perception that a person's personality, skills or attitudes, rather than fate, chance or luck (external locus of control), determine both positive and negative life events (Rotter, 1966). Cultural adjustment literature has consistently shown a strong correlation between internal locus of control and psychological well-being (Bochner & Furnham, 1986; Ward et al., 2004). The correlation between locus of control and re-entry adjustment, specifically, has been minimally investigated. One study (Sasagawa, 2006) found empirical evidence to support the hypothesis that internal locus of control facilitates the re-entry process. It could be suggested that Rebecca's internal locus of control facilitated her re-entry adjustment.

Another indication of Rebecca's regulation of emotions approach was her tendency to rationalise others' behaviour. This became more evident by the sixth month home when she was making statements such as: *it wasn't just me that suffered out of the whole bust up; that's just how my father tried to make sense of it for himself – it's a generational thing; and it was different in other people's eyes. They had a different perception*. She showed, in some instances, not only great generosity of spirit in reframing others' behaviour thus, but also a capacity to move perspective from her own world view to that of others. She was consciously aware that *things become clearer as time goes on*. She was also consciously aware of her own burgeoning capacity in this regard; after four months home she claimed, *I have a better ability to see things from other people's perspectives and understand their motivations a bit better*. By the end of the sixth month home, much of the raw emotion emanating from the break-up and her simultaneous re-entry experience had abated and been replaced by a more objective, distanced perspective. Her choice of coping strategies directly contributed to this transformation. Consciously managing the environment and regulating her emotions, afforded her the capacity to both see and understand herself more clearly, and move some of the focus of her re-entry adjustment from self to other. The positive outcome of Rebecca's

emotion-focussed coping strategy stands in contrast to the findings of two studies which found that the relationship between an emotion-focussed approach and readjustment was negative (Furukawa, 1997; Herman & Tetrick, 2009).

Renewal

That Rebecca found her relationship break-up overwhelming is unquestionable. She felt *devastated*. Like a divorce, she was *just coping, just surviving*. Yet, because of her response, both affective and cognitive, to this *disaster*, rather than it being experienced as something destructive, she gradually, over a period of six months, came to feel *empowered* by it all. Her simultaneous cultural re-entry provided fertile ground for renewal. She felt, as a result of these twin experiences, that she *knew a lot more about [herself]*; she felt *very different, reawakened*, and not so *insignificant anymore*. Aware of these changes to self, she consciously sought and executed a new perspective on life and a new lifestyle.

She still, however, indicated elements of a problem-focussed coping strategy, by dealing with just *one day at a time*. She described *just looking at the little bit and living it every day* as making *life more fun*, as well as something that tended to get *overwhelmed with the big picture* before the exchange. Having short-term goals, such as university assignments, gave her a specific focus. Dealing with things in bite size pieces remained a characteristic of Rebecca's re-entry throughout the six months. Her sense of renewal, then, whilst clearly a genuine outcome of her re-entry, was scaffolded by her coping strategies.

Conclusion

Rebecca's re-entry experience was extraordinary in that it was intimately tied to the breakdown of her long-term relationship with her partner just weeks prior to leaving her exchange site. This relationship breakdown pre-determined an especially emotional and challenging re-entry experience. It was also a catalyst for change in Rebecca's life. Her experience with her partner stands in contrast to findings from other re-entry research which suggests that romantic relationships are characteristically challenged during re-entry (Howell, 2002; Martin, 1986) – primarily as a result of partners' difficulties in coming to terms with changes in the returnee. Her emotional and cognitive journey in making sense of her exchange experience, and ultimately her re-entry experience, therefore, began considerably earlier than for most returnees – while still overseas.

The critical role of others in either facilitating or hindering the re-entry process is a manifest finding to emerge from Rebecca's narrative. While her personal coping strategies

demonstrated, convincingly, the power of individual cognition in determining many aspects of her re-entry experience, the influence of others' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours was undeniable. Rebecca's re-entry, then, underscores the ubiquitous role of relationships in re-adjustment to the home culture.

For Rebecca, re-entry was a twin process of both protecting herself and renewing herself within this protective layer. What emerged from this chrysalis at the end of six months was a person with a reformed personality and outlook on life, a direct outcome of a resolute, determined attitude.

Stasis

Joseph

Whenever he was en route from one place to another, he was able to look at his life with a little more objectivity than usual. It was often on trips that he thought most clearly, and made the decisions that he could not reach when he was stationary.

(Paul Bowles, *The Sheltering Sky*)

Introduction

As I wait outside the meeting room for my first interview with Joseph, I am consciously aware of how I try to predict each of my participant's appearance and personality, a projection based solely on email contact. Joseph has played a very close hand to this point in time – I have been able to glean very little. All I know is that he is leaving Australia to live and work in Japan on July 30 – just five months away. Our three interviews must fit within this time frame.

As he turns the corner around the towering bookshelves that obscure the entrance to the meeting room, the first thing I notice is his long, straight, thick, sandy hair. He smiles shyly and accepts my outstretched hand. As we enter the room I notice he is about my height – not tall for a Western male. His choice of clothing could be indicative of his uncertainty around the formality of this meeting – jeans, collared shirt and blazer.

My first reading of Joseph's shy smile seems accurate. He is quietly spoken and, initially, appears to be a little nervous: he struggles to maintain eye contact. I am not surprised to hear him describe himself as *pretty shy at times*. It takes just moments for me to realise that behind this cautious exterior is a warm, thoughtful, intelligent and circumspect young man.

Joseph is a 25 year old Law graduate who studied Japanese as a major in the first three years of his undergraduate degree. He has recently returned from a five month exchange in Nagoya as part of a graduate diploma in Asian Languages. His lecturers advised him that if he wanted to improve his Japanese further, he would have to go to Japan.

My lecturers wanted me to go for one year, but I compromised and said I would go for 6 months. In hindsight I should have gone for a year...

Joseph has a love affair with Japan. His recent exchange to Nagoya is his fourth sojourn there.

In grade 10 I went on a two week school trip to Japan and then at the end of grade 10 I spent a year there as an exchange student – in Kōchi. I was just 15 when I left home; I turned 16 while I was over there. It was intense. I learnt a lot of Japanese, and learnt a lot about myself, too – that I could do things on my own, that I could rely on myself. I learnt lots about communicating with people; I was pretty shy up until I left. It taught me a lot about coming out of my shell and talking to people. I guess I'm still pretty shy at times. It was a good thing to do.

Then, just before I started uni I went back to visit friends for a couple of months; that was my third trip.

Apart from a few days in Singapore on the way home, Japan is the only overseas country I've visited. It's an interesting place. I have developed quite an interest in Japanese culture. I am doing Aikido and I enjoy Japanese art work and movies.

Joseph also has a love affair with language, something which, ironically, results in the breakdown of another love affair.

I started learning languages in grade 7. I have always enjoyed studying foreign languages, and done pretty well at them - Japanese, in particular. Japanese was the first thing I wanted to do when I came to uni many years ago. At high school I didn't put a lot of time into studying, but I got straight As in all three languages I studied. So that was a good incentive to keep going! I don't know why, but just speaking in another language, for me, feels good. It just feels right. I don't know how to explain it. I spent years trying to explain it to my ex-girlfriend because she never understood what it was that was drawing me towards the sorts of jobs that I wanted to do. I guess if I had been able to explain it a bit better to her she might have been more understanding and things might have turned out differently. But I just couldn't explain what it was that it did for me.

I ended up breaking up with my girlfriend while I was in Japan – she comes into this a lot. We'd been going out for a couple of years when she told me that she didn't want to leave our home town in Tasmania. That's pretty hard for someone who wants to use Japanese in their

career. Anyway, we had some discussions over a pretty long period, but they didn't come to anything. After I finished my degree I didn't want to just be a lawyer, so I decided to go back and study a bit more. I enrolled in a graduate diploma in Asian Languages. I tried to combine my two majors by studying a couple of courses on Japanese law and the Japanese legal system and translating Japanese legal documents.

The reason I broke up with my girlfriend while I was in Japan was that I wanted to go back and work there. It just got to the stage, when I was over there, where everyone kept asking me the worst question they could possibly ask me, which was: "You are really good at Japanese. What are you going to do with it in the future?" My response would be, "Well, I would love to do this and this, but really I am going to do nothing." In the end I did apply for a job – not the one I've wanted for the last nine years, which is translating documents, but a teaching job – it's part of the JET scheme. I start on July 30.

Joseph stares long and hard at the surface of the table in front of him. The rawness of his pain is evident. The choice he has made has not been easy – for him or for others –something he has yet to come to terms with. I am reminded once again of Thoreau's prophetic words: "you never gain something but that you lose something."

Being in Japan

After some initial, but very short term, uncertainty about his decision to study in Japan, the majority of Joseph's Japanese experience is *fantastic*. It is dominated by two key aspects: his campus life and his romantic relationships, neither of which are mutually exclusive. Like Rebecca, Joseph experiences the breakdown of a previous long term relationship while on exchange; this is the only thing that mars an otherwise enjoyable and fulfilling time.

Living in Nagoya

Joseph demonstrates a blend of romanticism and realism in his sharing of living experiences in Nagoya.

It was a bit surreal when I first arrived in Nagoya. I kept thinking, "I shouldn't even really be here. I should be just getting on with my life and being a lawyer." It all seemed a bit pointless. By that stage I had sort of resigned myself to the fact that I wasn't going to be able to use my Japanese professionally, and that I was going to come back and stay with my girlfriend and

get bored. It was also surreal just because everything seemed so familiar. I was with all these other exchange students who were finding everything strange, and I had seen it all before.

I was on the outskirts of Nagoya, so there were still rice paddies around and we had a park just behind us. In the city itself it was a bit different – more high rise buildings, much shinier, especially because they had just done up the city because they were hosting the World Expo that year. It is a pretty spectacular city in places. There's this funny shopping complex right in the middle. It's got this spaceship-type set up with a glass roof and water flowing over the top and you can actually go up on the roof and look down through the water to the people below.

Because we were a fair way out of the centre of the city we would have to walk to the bus stop, catch the bus to the subway, and then take the subway into the city. It was a bit of a trip, but not too bad, about an hour of travel all up. I rarely travelled alone; there would usually be at least two of us going. We'd probably go into the city once a week, or maybe once a fortnight, depending how much study I had and what else was going on. We'd go just for fun, to go shopping or sometimes to see the sights.

Once I went into the city with Tania – the girl I ended up going out with in Japan. I had only recently broken up with Jane, so I was feeling pretty raw. Tania loved tofu, especially Japanese tofu, so we went to this really nice tofu restaurant that specialised in anything with soy beans, basically. We had a seven course meal – very little courses. It was just magic really and afterwards we were walking around and stopped at one of those little photo booths and got some shots done.

Joseph pulls out the sticker-sized photo from his wallet and smiles at the image. He slides it across the table for me to see. Both he and Tania are smiling broadly in the photo. When I comment to him that the photo seems to have sentimental value for him, he explains that it is one of the few shots he has of his time with Tania: he didn't use a camera in Japan this time. I can only guess that this is a reflection of the fact that this was Joseph's fourth visit to Japan. I cannot imagine this being the case if it were his first visit.

Joseph is a realist. While he has experienced some of the romanticism of Japan, he also recognises much of the predictability of living.

Living in Nagoya isn't that different to living here. What I mean is, you have your house, you go about your daily business, you speak Japanese a lot more, but other than that it's really

only the minor things that are different, like the ways of separating garbage, of not being able to get good cheese or being able to get wonderful tofu or a million different types of mushrooms in the supermarket. But the reality is, you still make your dinner, you tidy up and you go to bed.

This time in Japan was very different to my grade 11 exchange experience. I was certainly more comfortable and confident this time around, which meant I enjoyed it more. It was a fantastic six months. I enjoyed just about the whole time – taking out the time I was breaking up with my girlfriend – that wasn't too pleasant. That was the only time I took a day off school.

Campus life

Most of Joseph's discussion in the first interview relates to his university life. This is antithetical to all other five participants in this study who had to be prompted to comment on university life when sharing their memories of their exchange sites. Being sponsored by both his home culture and host culture universities meant that much of the financial burden often associated with overseas living is removed for Joseph.

In grade 11 I lived with a host family; this time I had my own apartment – just five minutes walk from the uni – and there were 80 exchange students there. They were from all over the place – Australia, New Zealand, America, France, China, Korea, Vietnam, Belgium. Some stayed for six months, some for a year. We all lived really close to each other and hung out a lot. I had people on hand all the time because a lot of them lived within five minutes walk. So, I did do a lot of socialising. It was a really good community atmosphere and the university itself was amazing – the way they looked after exchange students.

*They're really set up for exchange students. Every time you had an issue or a question, you could just go straight up to the office and they would deal with it, whatever it was. Even if it seemed completely unreasonable, they would still deal with it. It was amazing. Like, here, you go to Student Administration for the simplest issue and it will take weeks and they'll screw you around! In Japan, we had the option of leaving in either in December or January – depending on our commitments back in our home countries – and they would adjust the end of term exams and the end of semester. I had planned to leave in December and go travelling for a couple of weeks with my now ex-girlfriend. Of course, we broke up, so I thought I would like to stay for those extra weeks and keep studying. But this was two weeks **after** the deadline for notifying them. So, I just went up to the office and explained my situation. The office*

person simply said, “I will look up the computer”, typed it in, changed it, and said, “It is all done.”

It isn't just the administrative support that Joseph finds appealing about university life in Japan: he develops some close and rewarding relationships.

It was the people that meant a lot to me at uni. We had a great class and we had a great time in class, and it wasn't just mucking around either; we all did incredibly well in our results. We all gelled very well and there was a great atmosphere. It was a particularly diverse group, which is probably why we gelled so well – Japanese was the only common language. I've never experienced a class like it; the teacher said the same thing. One of our teachers cried at the end of semester. The other classes on either side of us were jealous because they could hear us laughing a lot. I wish I could go straight back and see them all. It was interesting seeing some of the other students' experiences at the uni because there was a huge range of ability, starting with people who spoke virtually no Japanese, to my class which was the top class there.

The specificity with which Joseph recalls some of his assessment tasks is an indication of the significance of his university experience in the overall exchange.

We had classes from 9.00 until 11.00 with a short break in the middle and in the afternoons they had optional classes that were held in English. We would usually take one or two of them a week. A lot of the afternoon classes were just for the sake of interest like an area of Japanese culture that you were interested in; we got course credit for these. I did one for the semester I was there. It was 'Bushido' and it was a lot of fun. Actually, one of the great memories I've got is that at the end of the year for that class, my final assignment was to write an essay about a chapter of a book written by a guy who was really influential on the subject. Anyway, I was talking with a couple of guys who all did martial arts and one of them said, “Wouldn't it be cool if we could convince the lecturer to let us make an action movie instead of writing this essay?” We knew this lecturer was a pretty easy-going guy, so we asked him. He said, “Yes, I would like to watch an action movie instead of marking essays.” So we made the movie! We spent about four times as much time doing this as we would have done on an essay, but it only went for half an hour. It was great fun. We were throwing each other around in the snow, which was cold, but still fun. There was very little intellectual content, although we did refer to the lecture notes and his book occasionally. There was one great scene where we were sneaking up on some guards in this castle and one of my friends was clomping along the corridor in 'geta', which are wooden sandals, and he suddenly

realised that he was making a huge racket so he takes them off and creeps up behind this guard, holds a sword above his head and then launches into this long speech about his family descendants and what not, which is what they used to do in the Kamakura period. He actually took his speech directly from the lecture notes as an example of what we'd been doing. Then Steven comes along and hits this guy in the head – pokes his head around the corner and says, "Hey, it's not the Kamakura period!" I've still got a copy of this movie and I showed it to all my friends when I came back. I usually have to explain a few things, like that joke, in particular.

For another one of our assignments we had to produce our own newspaper. We all had to write up one interview that we had done with one of the Japanese at the uni about their part-time work. We were giving speeches pretty much every week throughout the term, so we had to choose two of our speeches, condense them and change them a bit into a more formal writing style and include them as well.

Despite his skill and confidence in, and enjoyment of, Japanese, Joseph shows a definite sense of humility in terms of how much he has yet to learn.

I was learning a huge amount of Japanese. If I could have kept doing that for another six months, I'd be set. I definitely learnt a lot of Japanese while I was there, but there's still a lot I'd like to learn.

Being a foreigner

Joseph highlights both the advantages and disadvantages of being a foreigner in Japan.

During lunch time we actually got paid if we went to a thing called English Lounge. This is where the Japanese students could come in and spend their lunch hour talking to us and we got one thousand yen per hour for doing that. I did that once or twice a week usually, depending on how much study I had. It was lots of fun, there were lots of people there and I made some friends. It was interesting seeing the way the Japanese students responded to us as well because it is very weird being a foreigner in Japan. They react to you very differently to the way they react to each other. It's like you're an alien, really. They get absolutely shocked when they realise you can speak Japanese. They think it's impossible for a foreigner to speak Japanese. I didn't feel it as much this time in Nagoya because it is a big city and there are lots of foreigners around, but when I was in Kōchi I would ride past work sites each morning and the workmen would yell out, "Look at the foreigner!" I would shout back – in

Japanese – “Look at the Japanese people.” You still do get a bit of it at the university. Many of the students were really shy about talking to foreigners, so you had to try and bring them out of their shell. Then you had the stalkers who you had to avoid at all costs.

Stalkers? I ask.

Yes. Girls who were trying to pick you up because they thought it would be exciting to go out with a foreigner and a lot of guys took advantage of that. I can't say that I did. There was one girl – she was one of the really shy ones – she and her friend came along to English Lounge for the very first time. Even though she went to a neighbouring university, it was still allowed. She didn't speak much English at all. Two of us slowly brought her out of her shell. And even though we weren't meant to speak any Japanese we did translate a few things for her to help her along. She came the next week and brought us cookies. She'd written this little note thanking us for helping her out. She ended up going out with my friend.

Joseph explains that reluctance to speak English is partly related to shyness, but also related to fear of embarrassment. I ask him if he felt special in Japan because of his difference. His response indicates a well developed level of cultural sensitivity, where difference is not experienced as threatening, but rather as idiosyncratic – understandable only within a cultural context (M. Bennett, 1993).

Yes, I did. Partly because I was a foreigner, although that got on my nerves a bit – being treated like I was special all the time. You know, “You don't need to speak English. My Japanese is a whole lot better than your English!” But I also felt special because it was where I could do what I do best, which is speaking Japanese – and put it to some use. It's a bit hard to separate the two. I know there are some quite active right wing groups who are intolerant of foreigners, but I didn't tend to encounter them. Mostly people aren't overtly hostile; they're just unsure of how to deal with a foreigner, so I would often have people avoid me. Not because they thought I was disgusting or whatever, but simply because they felt unsure. I guess if you don't know the reasons behind people's avoidance behaviour you could get quite offended.

Japanese and Australians are very different. I'm not sure where to start. The Japanese have a very strong hierarchical aspect to their culture and there are very strictly defined gender roles. There is the shyness thing, and the hesitancy about dealing with the unknown, but I guess one of the major differences is their perception of 'inside' and 'outside' relationships. It comes through in their language and in their dealings with people. They see a person as

either 'inside' their group, and in that case they are very welcoming – very warm. In the extreme, if you are accepted as an 'insider', often a foreigner will feel claustrophobic given that sort of attention. I didn't, I guess because I expected it and knew what it was about – that there was no ulterior motive involved. It was just the way things were done. But I know there were a lot of people who did feel that. I remember feeling like that the first time I went to Japan.

The 'outside' people, who they tend to give the cold shoulder to, are completely ignored. It is quite complicated because you can be an 'inside' person with some people in some circumstances, and not others. If you join a club, you are instantly an 'inside' person with the club members, for example. So, any organised university activity, you're instantly an 'inside' person with everyone. I guess this is why the administration staff were always so accommodating. You are an inside person, so they will do anything for you – and expect in return that you give everything back. So any activity at uni, we were expected to join in and be an active part of. You had to go along to everything. If they organised a party, you would be expected to go and if you couldn't, they would be disapproving. Which is so different to how it is here – you organise something, a party or whatever, and people turn up or not, as they like. But there are polite ways to refuse in Japan. It is just a matter of explaining your needs and saying, "I am very sorry and I don't mean to be rude and I will come along to the next one."

When I ask which society he would prefer to live in – Australia or Japan – Joseph provides a cautious response.

I would like to spend time in both places. For the next few years I would like to live in Japan, but after that, I don't know. I wouldn't want to live there forever; I think after a while it would become a bit claustrophobic. There are things that would end up bugging me – being singled out all the time and having the expectation of being very strange, so that with every new person I have to deal with I have to experience their emotion that I am going to be this complete weirdo. It is interesting for a while, but even this last time, it did start to bug me. So, I can see myself, in the future, spending a few years over there and a few years somewhere else. Maybe back here, who knows where.

Being Home

Being home is, for Joseph, *complicated*. One of the reasons for this is that it is a short term, finite experience. He returns to Tasmania at the beginning of February, only to discover soon

after, that he has a job to return to in Japan in July – a job he actually applied for while on exchange in Japan. This six month period at home he describes as *being stuck in limbo*. Being home is also complicated because there is mixed emotion involved – trepidation, fear, excitement and contentment. It is, simultaneously, a time of significant decision-making and consequent life changes.

Reluctant return

Joseph's reluctance to finally leave Japan stands in direct contrast to his initial *surreal* and *pointless* feelings of being in Nagoya. Clearly he has travelled a great distance – literally and metaphorically – since first arriving in Nagoya.

After two months

It wasn't much fun preparing to come home. I just tried not to think about it. I left the packing until the last day. I knew it was coming and I thought that I would try and enjoy what I had as much as I could. So, I went out with friends and spent a lot of time with Tania. I tried not to think about it until I got in the plane.

The word that springs to mind as I was flying towards Australia is "sad". I was sad at leaving everything behind. I expected it to be hard. I knew it would be hard leaving Tania. I knew it would be hard seeing Jane again and that the legal course I had enrolled in at home would be hard. I pretty much expected everything, even down to the sense of potentially losing everything – because it was all pretty foreseeable. I expected even the more basic things of missing the environment and the food in Japan – all those things that come with living overseas. I had done it all before so I knew what it was going to be like.

I was leaving the place I really wanted to be, with the person I really wanted to be with. I knew that as soon as I got home I would have to move all my stuff out of my ex-girlfriend's place. She wasn't talking to me, none of her friends were talking to me, so I'd lost part of my social group, and many of my friends were overseas.

Joseph describes his experience of arriving at the airport in Australia. His words resonate strongly with Ballard's (1981) description of home culture airports as places of "facing the realities of one's own culture" (p. 6).

Coming through Customs was a major shock because I had recently been through Customs in Japan and Singapore, and both times the people were incredibly polite and efficient, even though in Singapore you have police standing to the side with machine guns! Coming back

into Australia, you had people shunting everyone into lines and they were condescending, especially to the Japanese people. They were incredibly condescending and rude. Also, hearing so many Australian accents was weird. It's something we are sort of used to – that condescension from people in those sorts of positions – but I had forgotten.

New Spaces

Much of Joseph's reluctance to return was related to what awaited him in Tasmania. It was not to be a stereotypical warm, celebratory welcoming experience for him.

After four months

When I got back I had to move out of my ex-girlfriend's place. That was hard, to say the least. She was busy the first weekend so I had to wait a week and a half before I could do it. I was supposed to use dad's truck to transport my stuff and it broke down at the last minute, so I tried to hire a truck but they were all booked out. So that left me with a trailer and my friend's Volvo. We managed, but it was a squeeze. One of my Aikido teachers offered to lend me his trailer. My friends were all happy to just chip in and help me move everything out. Everyone did a fantastic job of making it easier for me, even people who weren't close to me were brilliant. I remember talking with a friend in London about things that were happening at home and he sent another of our friends around to check up on me. He couldn't help out himself, so he made sure someone else could.

Joseph is humbled by the level of social support he receives. It has clearly made a challenging situation less stressful. Much of the re-entry literature attests to the positive benefits of such social support (see, for example, Lank, 1985; Martin, 1986; Wilson, 1985).

The hardest part was seeing Jane again. I hadn't seen her in months and she looked very different and wouldn't talk to me at all. So, I live with my dad now, which is not the most comfortable arrangement, but it will do in the short term.

I had moved out and had my own place before I went to Japan. These days, when I am at dad's place, it's pretty much like I am just at the end of the house doing my own thing. It's very different to the time I came home after my grade 11 year in Japan. I had to learn how to live with my family again and fit in. I'd been trying so hard to learn how to fit in with my host family for so long, and learn their ways of doing things. I kept wanting to drink cold tea instead of soft drinks.

People in my family are pretty interested about my time away. They often ask me about it. Dad's interest is mostly about asking me to get stuff from Japan for him that he can't get here yet! My brother is the sort of person who tends to stick his head in a computer and disappear, so unless he wants to know about the latest computer gadgets, which I can't help him with anyway, he's not that interested. My mum is already planning to come and visit me when I return to Japan.

My relationship with some of my friends – the ones that still talk to me – has been really positive. The way they have supported me through all of this has been above and beyond the call of duty, really, like how quite a few of them want to come and visit me in Japan. They are already booking tickets.

I talk with my friends all the time about my experiences in Japan. A lot of them have spent time travelling and living overseas. My really close circle of friends – they've all been overseas. I find it hard to connect with people who are intolerant towards other cultures. I did have a lot of friends who hadn't travelled, but they don't talk to me now...

Joseph's preference, during re-entry, for the company of those who have previous travel experience, is a common finding from re-entry research (see, for example, Lank, 1985; Raschio, 1987). Common travel experience clearly creates a sense of resonance for Joseph.

I do more things with fewer people these days. And I don't have a girlfriend now which completely changes my interaction with a lot of people. I guess, in a lot of ways, it is more comfortable now. But in some ways it is not. It was very nice to be able to go home to Jane and cook dinner for the two of us. But, going out places, it is more comfortable now.

After six months

After six months home, Joseph's close relationships are more tangibly relaxed.

Jane is talking to me now – a little bit. I met her for coffee a little while ago and we are actually meeting again tomorrow. It is still a bit awkward, but it is nice to be able to talk to her again. I really like her and I want to talk to her. I would like it if we could stay friends.

When I go to mum's these days, she is very mothering. She cooks for me and gets me treats. I have just been enjoying it.

I'm still at dad's – just flitting in and out. It's not really as much of a home as I would like it to be, but then again, I am leaving for Japan in a few weeks.

I have always thought of Tasmania as home, but I probably won't spend a lot of time here. I guess a home is somewhere I can come back to at the end of the day and be myself and relax – where I can escape from the rest of the world.

Joseph's notion of 'home' is congruent with both Schuetz's (1945) and Storti's (2001) assertion that home is place of familiarity – routines, traditions, patterns of interaction and so on.

Steering a new course

Coming home is a catalyst for significant career and life changes for Joseph. Rather than being entirely impulsive, these changes represent wise and prudent choices based on reflection of previous experience.

After two months

Within a week of coming home, Joseph makes his first big career decision.

When I arrived home I was supposed to be in a legal practice course. I have never been too keen on practising law but I thought it would be a useful qualification to have. It enables you to practise law, and it's also useful for all sorts of other jobs as well. What I didn't realise was that it was starting three weeks earlier than most uni courses, so when I booked my tickets, I accidentally booked them for two days after it started. When I got home, I went for a shower and then went straight to the course – on the same day! That was hard. I hadn't thought about law for a year or more, and as I said, I never really liked it in the first place. On top of that, I can't stand the pretentiousness that surrounds the practice of law, and therefore couldn't stand most of the other students. By the time you get to the legal practice course you're thoroughly immersed in it. There's a high drop out rate all through a law degree and the people who drop out tend to be the ones who are less pretentious and more the people who I get along with.

It got to the first weekend, when I was going to catch up on my missed lectures and do my assignments for the next week. However, first I checked my email only to find that I had three new emails from lecturers with yet more work to do. At that point I had had it. I sent an email to the coordinator and quit.

This decision leaves Joseph free to focus on his Japanese courses.

After four months

After four months home there is a marked change in Joseph's sense-making of his re-entry experience. He is less reactive and more reflective in his thinking. He now has a broader perspective on his decision-making.

If I hadn't gone away, I may well have soldiered on regardless with the law course, but it would have been pretty miserable. So, I guess going away taught me that I don't have to, and that there are other paths. It is not worth putting myself through that for something I am not really aiming for anyway. Before, I probably would have thought, "Well, it's a qualification I really should have, so I really should stick it out and do it." But there are better things to do really.

The "shoulds" in Joseph's last comment catch my attention. I have always interpreted the word "should" as representing a sense of 'duty' rather than 'desire'; it seems that Joseph has reached a similar conclusion.

I remember on the last afternoon I attended the course there was this 'bonding session' which was supposed to help us become a legal fraternity – something we were going to have to do every couple of weeks. It was like an 'all boys club'. Everyone was trying really hard to be a part of it. A lot of the guys were talking with the lecturer about girls. I remember thinking, "Is this what lawyers talk about? Is this all there is? You have a horrible job and then you come out and you talk about the girl standing over there and you drink beer." I remember thinking, "I really don't want to be a part of this." It may work for them. It may be what they want. It is just that it is not what I want.

I guess it's tied into all the other things that happened while I was away as well. Just that sense of feeling more confident about making decisions now. I made a lot of choices while I was away and even more since I have come back. I feel less helpless now. I don't know what the opposite of helpless is, but I would rather phrase it in a positive way.

I mention the word "empowered." Joseph nods.

He reflects on his other university experiences since being home – those outside the Law Faculty.

This semester I am actually getting the worst marks I have ever got studying Japanese. I can't bring myself to do anything about it. It's not like I'm doing badly. I am getting distinctions, but that is the worst I have done in Japanese before and I just can't bring myself to put in the sort of effort that I would have put in before. I don't know whether it's related to having gone away or whether it's just that I've been at uni so long I'm tired. But, I'm doing them because I want to do them. I'm really enjoying them. It's something to keep me going.

*I think the uni here makes it difficult for students in general. I don't think that it's only difficult for people who have come home. In Japan all the lecturers and office staff – **everyone** – was really supportive. If you were having a problem in class, the lecturer would notice and they would try to help and do whatever it took to help you pass. I guess it's a different expectation of students as well, but over here, if you don't pass then you don't pass, and they don't care. I like the fact that the uni system here teaches you to look after yourself and be independent, and that's an important life skill to learn. But there are a lot of people who fall through the cracks and they would really benefit from being looked after in the way the Japanese do. Both systems have their merits.*

After six months

Joseph is still feeling comfortable about his decision some months later.

I am very glad I did what I did. I think I would still be doing the legal practice course now. I think if I'd gone through four or five weeks of it then there would have been no pulling out. I would have been committed. If I am going to pull out of something I do it early, otherwise I do the distance. I have been enjoying the courses I've been doing a lot, whereas it would have been a real battle to get through the law one.

There's such good camaraderie between the students in the Japanese course I'm doing here; it is such a good atmosphere. It is actually quite similar to what I was doing in Japan, and exactly what I liked about my class in Japan. The fact that I'm getting worse marks is simply because I haven't been putting in time at home. In one of our breaks recently I was talking about how much I miss 'anko' which is red bean paste that you get in Japan. You can't find it here, but you can get the ingredients to make it. One of the girls in the class made big batches of it and she brought some in for me and another guy who also said he missed it. She also invited us around to her place after the last test.

The lecturers are very respectful. They want to draw on our opinions and experience. It's important that I've done these courses. For those two months or so where I was just waiting, it was something to keep me going, something to concentrate on and keep me focussed on where I wanted to go.

Waiting

One of the direct outcomes of Joseph's decision-making is a feeling of uncertainty – not uncertainty in terms of the appropriateness of his decisions, but uncertainty in terms of not knowing what to expect. His repetitive use of the word *waiting* exemplifies this feeling of uncertainty. He clearly feels a degree of vulnerability in the first four months home. This is gradually replaced by acceptance and confidence.

After four months

I feel like a lot of my time since coming back has just been waiting for the next thing. When I first got back I was waiting to move out from my ex-girlfriend's place, then I was waiting for the interview for JET, then waiting for the response, then waiting to find out where I was going. Now I'm just waiting to go. It's not as hard as when I first came back – things are starting to come together again.

One of the major events that happened after I returned was my interview for the JET program. You might remember that it was my application for the JET program that caused me to break up with Jane and one of the things that inspired me to quit the legal practice course. If I got the JET job then I wouldn't need the legal practice qualification anyway. Of course, if I didn't get it, I would be left with nothing. Needless to say I was pretty nervous. I could hardly breathe as I went into the interview room. I was a little bit thrown because they changed the format from what they said it would be. The worst part, however, was that I made stupid mistakes and nothing came into my head like it should have. The one plus that did come out of the interview was that they told me that if I didn't get the job that I applied for, they may still offer me a job teaching English. I was pretty desperate, so anything to clutch onto was good at that point. Even so, I did so badly in the interview that I thought even the teaching job was a long shot.

So, afterwards I walked out completely numb and stood in the sunshine while it all dawned on me. I thought I was left with nothing, and of course, I couldn't really be sure until they contacted me, so I started my despairing – slash – hopeful game for two months. It wasn't really thoughts a much as feelings. I would cycle from completely despairing that I had lost

everything, to hopeful that I might at least have the teaching job (which I did in the end), to thinking, “Well, I didn’t get it this year. I will work my arse off so that I can get it next time.”

After six months

In hindsight, Joseph’s courageous decision-making of some months ago, now seems vindicated.

I still remember what it felt like. It was awful for those couple of months afterwards. Now it is all worthwhile, but it was pretty terrible at the time.

Recognising difference

As well as coming to terms with some major life decisions in his re-entry period, Joseph also focuses on more micro level aspects of life. In particular, he notices differences between Tasmania and Japan, some experienced positively and some negatively. It is almost as if he is seeking justification for his decision to leave his home culture again; he is seeking a legitimate way forwards.

After four months

I notice little things now – like people in shops. In Japan, when you are a shopkeeper, you are trained to be really, really polite. A lot of the time it’s just an act, a public performance, but we don’t have that here. Sometimes the shopkeepers are genuinely relaxed and comfortable, but sometimes they are just dull and ignore you. That is something that would never happen in Japan.

Because I couldn’t drive in Japan, I appreciated being able to walk places more. Before I went away I would drive lots of places. These days, rather than driving into the city and driving around the block trying to find a park, I just drive to a suburb near the city and walk.

Sometimes I miss the food, but then again, that is really tricky because there are foods I miss from Japan, but there are also a whole lot of things that I miss from here when I am over there. It’s very frustrating. You can’t have it both ways, I guess. So, when I am here I eat what is good here and try not to recreate what is over there. Then, when I am over there, I try to eat what is good there, and try not re-create what is here.

I don’t like the parochialism you see here a lot of the time in the media, particularly from the government. Often they don’t look at the big picture, but then that has always bugged me.

Tania and I would often have these great debates. She would complain about the American government and I would complain about the Australian government.

A lot of my friends who have gone overseas say similar things. One of my friends in London had this long rant on his blog about racism in Australia. He works with immigrant workers in London, and one of them asked him if Australia was racist. He thought about the Cronulla riots, the government's detention centres, our immigration policy and our history of dealing poorly with aboriginals, and he said, "Yes."

Tasmania is fairly parochial. There are a lot of people who are born here, grow up here and would like to stay here forever. I was telling a friend the other day, there are three types of people who live in Tasmania. There are the ones who were born here, grow up here, always want to stay here. There are the ones who move here to retire because it's a beautiful place. Then there are the ones who can't get out. Going to Japan soon means I'm moving out of the 'can't get out' category.

Ever since my German teacher in high school pointed it out to me, this has always bugged me – that you constantly hear Tasmanians say, "This is the most beautiful place in the world. You will never find this place anywhere else." Sure, it is really beautiful in places, but most of those people have never been anywhere else. There are plenty of other beautiful places in the world and I've been to some of them! So, you can't say it's the most beautiful place in the world and that you would never want to be anywhere else if you haven't got anything to compare it with!

After six months

With a new job secured in Japan, Joseph seems more at ease with his temporary life at home. He no longer needs to worry about re-adjusting to his home culture; he is moving on.

I feel much more relaxed and lazy in a way, even. Just comfortable.

You can't really prepare people for coming home. It's just something they have to do and work through in their own way.

Final words

In a very narrow sense, I've learned a whole lot of Japanese. I guess I have learned not to limit myself, that I am not really stuck doing the things that I am expected to do or that I think I should do. That I can go and do the things I want to do and it is going to be ok.

Before he leaves the meeting room, Joseph opens the wrapped parcel I hand him – the same thing I have handed over to each participant. He smiles broadly at the atlas. He immediately turns to the page housing Japan and uses his forefinger to trace the faint red and black lines. He begins an excited commentary. I momentarily wonder whether any other page in the atlas will ever receive the same loving attention. He realises, after a short while, just how long he has been sitting, immersed in his virtual world. He closes the atlas with an embarrassed smile and shakes my hand, warmly. He reminds me to look him up if ever I happen to be in Japan.

Making meaning

How prior experience affected the re-entry

Joseph did not want to come home; leaving Japan made him *sad*. That the qualitative nature of his re-entry would be directly influenced by this emotional state was unquestionable. Re-entering his home culture and attempting to adjust, then, was something in which Joseph engaged knowingly, but reluctantly. This period of attempted adjustment was brief, however. After two months home, Joseph was no longer adjusting, he was in stasis, waiting to go again.

Joseph's re-entry experience – his third from Japan – underscores the symbiotic nature of the relationship between the overseas sojourn and re-entry. The simultaneous demise of his romantic relationship and his application for a job in Japan, occurring while on exchange, profoundly influenced his re-entry experience. The direct, tangible outcomes of these two simultaneous events on his re-entry were, in the first instance: moving all his belongings out of his *ex-girlfriend's place* and moving in with his father; reforging a new and different relationship with his ex-girlfriend; *los[ing]* much of his previous *social group*; withdrawing from his professional legal practice course, and *waiting* for news of his job in Japan. While the majority of the initial outcomes he faced were *pretty terrible*, and resulted in him *despairing* at times, some were affirming; for example, the *support* of some of his friends was *above and beyond the call of duty*. After two months home, by which time his job in Japan had been confirmed and many of the initial re-entry challenges overcome, Joseph was more *hopeful*, more *relaxed*, *comfortable* and more *positive* about the outcomes of his earlier decisions in Japan and Tasmania. Joseph himself recognised, after just four months home, the

link between his overseas experience and his re-entry experience: *it's tied into all the other things that happened while I was away as well...if I hadn't gone away, I may well have soldiered on regardless with the law course...going away taught me that I don't have to, and that there are other paths.* What happened in Japan directly influenced what happened in Tasmania on his return.

It isn't possible then, to consider Joseph's re-entry in isolation from his overseas experience. For the last four of the six months he spent at home after his overseas exchange, he knew that he had a job to return to in Japan – a job he applied for while still on exchange. Thus, unlike the other participants in this study, he knew that his re-entry time in his home culture was finite. This knowledge had a clear and direct impact on his re-entry, in terms of both the duration and manner of his adjustment. After two months home, his job in Japan was secure. In essence, this meant that he no longer needed to prioritise adjustment – he would be leaving again in four month's time. This perhaps helps to explain why his re-entry challenges eased considerably by the end of the second month home. After this time, he was simply waiting – in stasis – there being no compulsion to, or tangible benefits from (other than the temporary relief that comes with 'ease of fit'), seeking genuine adjustment. It could be suggested, therefore, that this reversed the sojourn, re-entry relationship for the last four of his six months home; the re-entry to Tasmania became the known short-term stay, and the return to Japan would become the re-entry. None of this, however, exempted Joseph from experiencing many of the same challenges faced by other returnees in his first two months home. He still had to renegotiate relationships, re-establish living conditions, adjust to different social and academic environments and make decisions about his future life.

Joseph showed throughout his re-entry period a capacity to acknowledge and critically appraise, aspects of both cultures. He, too, like a number of other participants in this study, was, then, able to be both observer and participant of his own and another culture; he had a bicultural perspective, something only possible after having lived in another culture. In Joseph's case, four sojourns to the same country had resulted in him being particularly *au fait* with the cultural norms of that society. As evidence of this bi-cultural perspective, he was able to 'explain' aspects of stereotypical Japanese behaviour: *this is why the administration staff were so accommodating.* In regard to the Japanese attitude towards foreigners – which is often positioned negatively – Joseph commented: *they're just unsure of how to deal with a foreigner.* He described knowledgeably, the *very different* Japanese and Australian ways of doing things. Similarly, his tendency towards isomorphic attribution (Triandis, 1975) was apparent: *I guess if you don't know the reasons behind people's avoidance behaviour you could get quite offended; and I expected it and knew what it was about – ...there was no*

ulterior motive involved. It was just the way things were done. That he both understood, and was sympathetic towards, Japanese culture was most apparent.

Joseph was, at the same time, however, aware of his home culture's idiosyncratic ways of behaving – ways that he had, in some cases, temporarily forgotten. In referring to the manner of some of the Customs officials upon his re-entry, he commented: *that condescension from people in these sorts of positions...I had forgotten.* He showed heightened awareness of *little things* in the Australian culture, such as how people behave in shops: *that would never happen in Japan.* Joseph's attitude towards his re-entry experience of Australian cultural ways indicated a cultural maturity possible only because of his overseas exchange.

Noteworthy, however, is the fact that there was a distinct silence in Joseph's narrative around those things in his home culture that he found particularly resonant. Unlike other participants in this study, all of whom commented explicitly on some aspects of Tasmania that they had missed, or had previously not appreciated, Joseph remained silent. This is not to suggest that Joseph didn't appreciate some aspects of Tasmanian physical or cultural life, it just remained unsaid. Perhaps it was his way of attempting to justify his return to Japan. The most positive commentary on his life in Tasmania related to his Japanese classes at university. The fact that he spoke of one day possibly returning to Tasmania to live, however, indicates he was not rejecting his home culture.

Another discernible influence of Joseph's exchange experience on his re-entry experience, related to his friendship patterns. He described his *really close circle of friends* as all having overseas experience, claiming that he found it *hard to connect with people who are intolerant towards other cultures.* This, coupled with fact that he did *more things with fewer people* since being home, suggests that his overseas experience reinforced his appreciation of culturally-tolerant people, something that contrasted strongly with his initial re-engagement at home with peers in the Law Faculty.

Themes emerging from the narrative

Cultural identity

Joseph's experience on exchange in Japan reinforced his love of the language and the culture. This resonance with Japan was not new: this exchange was his fourth visit to Japan, the number of visits affirmation of his sense of connection with the culture. He found this resonance difficult to articulate: *it feels good; it just feels right; I don't know how to explain it; I spent years trying to explain it to my ex-girlfriend...what it was that was drawing me towards the sorts of jobs that I wanted to do. I guess if I had been able to explain it a bit*

better to her...things might have turned out differently. Speaking Japanese made him feel special, primarily because it was what he d[id] best and he could also put it to some use.

That he was reluctant to leave Japan, and committed to returning to live and work there, is evidence of his strong identification with the host culture. Termed an “additive identity shift” by Sussman (2000, p. 365), Joseph’s strong identification with the host culture resulted in him returning to live in Japan, six months after his return to Australia. Joseph’s most recent sojourn had confirmed for him the fact that his cultural identity was intricately linked to Japan. Unlike some other sojourners whose strong host culture identification results in negativity towards, and rejection of, the home culture (see, for example, Christofi & Thompson, 2007), Joseph displayed no animosity towards Tasmania. His identification with Japan did not necessarily imply lack of identification with his home culture. He could see and understand both cultures. In this sense, his cultural identity had a distinct fluidity to it. While not exactly demonstrating an “intercultural identity shift” (Sussman, 2000, p. 367), where one’s cultural identity is dependent upon a capacity to hold multiple cultural scripts simultaneously, Joseph did demonstrate a capacity to move between two cultures. That his only cross-cultural experiences had been Japanese makes it speculative to suggest that he had an intercultural identity.

Yet, his strong identification with Japanese culture did not blind him to some of the potential problems associated with living there permanently. He claimed that he *wouldn’t want to live there forever* as it could become *claustrophobic*. Having to deal with constantly being *singled out*, could be *interesting for a while*, but after some time, would ultimately *bug* him. His solution was to spend some years in Japan and some years elsewhere, possibly in Tasmania. This suggests a conscious awareness, on Joseph’s part, of the importance of moving between cultures in order to maintain a balanced perspective on the inherent qualities and challenges of each. It is this that is central to understanding Joseph’s re-entry. He was never fully engaged in one culture or the other during his re-entry. While not necessarily illustrating ‘bicultural’ behaviour, his re-entry does illustrate someone biding time, waiting – not actively engaged in adjusting.

Empowerment

A discernible theme to emerge from Joseph’s re-entry experience was ‘empowerment’. A number of key decisions made during his overseas sojourn and his re-entry fuelled this sense of empowerment. First, recognising his strong identification with Japanese culture, Joseph made a decision, while in Japan, to apply for a job there. This ultimately resulted in the breakdown of his relationship with his girlfriend of two years in Tasmania. Second, upon

return to Tasmania, he withdrew from his legal practice course, recognising that he no longer *want[ed] to be part of* the legal fraternity. These decisions undoubtedly rendered Joseph vulnerable, at one point him declaring that he realised he could have been *left with nothing*. During these anxious two months of waiting for news of his job, his Japanese courses in Tasmania provided a critical point of focus: *it was something to keep me going, something to concentrate on and keep me focussed on where I wanted to go*. After six months home, he could *still remember what it felt like...awful for those couple of months*. Ultimately, after six months home he was *very glad [he] did what [he] did*, it all now seeming *worthwhile*. These decisions had ultimately helped Joseph feel like he was in control of his own life.

After just four months home Joseph was aware of his increased confidence in taking charge of the direction of his life: *I made a lot of choices while I was away and even more since I have come back. I feel less helpless now...more confident about making decisions*. After six months home he was even more convinced of the appropriateness of his earlier decisions. *I have learned...that I can go and do the things I want to do and it is going to be ok*.

Expectations

Another key theme to emerge from Joseph's re-entry experience relates to 'expectations'. Given that this was his fourth sojourn to Japan, it is perhaps not surprising that he *knew what to expect*. Expectations, realistic or unrealistic, emerge as a strong and consistent theme in re-entry literature. In Joseph's case, his expectations were self-identified as realistic, a direct result of having experienced re-entry from Japan on three other occasions. He expected *the more basic things of missing the environment and the food in Japan – all those things that come with living overseas*. He *had done it all before*, so *knew what it was going to be like*. But he also had realistic expectations in regard to the more unique re-entry conditions that he faced this time – reconnecting with his ex-girlfriend, participating in the legal practice course and the anxiety surrounding his job application. He *pretty much expected everything...even down to the sense of potentially losing everything*.

While not removing entirely the difficulties associated with re-entry, realistic expectations did allow Joseph to understand what was happening, and consequently to avoid some of the potential challenges. He spoke, for example, unlike Rebecca, of not attempting to replicate conditions from each culture in the other: *sometimes I miss the food..., but there are also a whole lot of things that I miss from here when I am over there...so, when I am here I eat what is good here and try not to recreate what is over there. Then when I am over there, I try to eat what is good there, and try not to recreate what is here*. Realistic expectations, then, conceivably ameliorated many of the cognitive challenges of Joseph's re-entry. Perhaps more

relevant, however, is the fact that Joseph knew after two months home that he was no longer re-entering his home culture: he was temporarily visiting. There was no need to engage too much with the difficulties associated with cognitive dissonance; they would soon solve themselves with his imminent departure.

Conclusion

Joseph's re-entry is understandable only in light of his strong identification with Japanese language and culture. Yet, this identification with the host culture began well before his re-entry experience. It began with his introduction to Japanese language as a grade 7 student and gained momentum over a series of four intervening sojourns. His re-entry experience was characterised in the initial stages by major changes, a direct result of a number of decisions that were all ultimately aimed at him returning to live and work in Japan. None of this negated the challenges associated with re-entry; it simply lessened their duration. After two months home, Joseph's return to Japan was confirmed, and this had a direct impact upon his affective and cognitive states; he no longer considered himself re-entering his home culture. He stopped attempting to adjust and began waiting. He remained in stasis. In Joseph's case, the perceived duration of re-entry directly affected its qualitative nature.

Reappraisal

Marie

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

(T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*)

Introduction

Marie is the only participant I have yet to meet. All I know of Marie at this stage is that her exchange was in Malmö, Sweden – the same as Rebecca. As I ponder the interesting possibilities that this parallelism poses, she knocks tentatively on my door and waits politely for me to invite her in. I am met instantly with a genuinely warm, wide smile, followed closely by, *Hi, I'm Marie*. She begins chattering as soon as she's in the door. I suspect it will not be a difficult task keeping Marie engaged in storytelling. As she settles herself into the chair and accepts the glass of water I offer her, I notice how her dark brown eyes seem to accentuate the fullness of her face. She is dressed casually in jeans and T shirt, an informality that seems to match her easygoing manner.

Marie is a 22 year old final year Education student. She is an experienced traveller, a combined result of her parents' adventurous spirits when she was a child, and a previous high school exchange to the United States of America. As testimony to this family's 'travel gene', Marie has two sisters – one older and one younger – both of whom have also been high school exchange students. Marie grew up in a small rural location in Tasmania.

I grew up on a dairy farm, so mum and dad always made sure that we had a trip away, at least every year – just to get away. They took us all over New Zealand and Australia. I was born in New Zealand, actually, and moved to Australia when I was five. We still had relatives in New Zealand, so we would go across and visit every couple of years; it was like a second home. We also visited every Australian state, mostly driving sort of holidays in 4WDs. I remember driving up the East Coast when I was about 10 or 11 and we did all the 'touristy' stuff, like theme parks in Brisbane. Then we went to Northern Queensland when I was in grade 7. I remember driving in a 4WD across the Simpson Desert for five weeks; that was

pretty amazing. I am very lucky. As kids we thought it was wonderful! I've always liked travelling.

Marie is smiling and laughing as she recalls what are clearly very fond memories for her.

Mum and dad would always have some sort of idea about what we'd be doing, like, they'd book us the boat fare, but then we'd just jump in the car and they'd say, "Let's go up the East Coast this time." So, we would just drive, without any real plans and stop off and see things on the way. I think that has impacted on my idea of travelling now, like, you just take it as it comes. No real itinerary. I don't think I could ever go on a structured tour.

Marie's first 'structured' overseas trip happens when she's in high school, a watershed experience in her life.

When I was 16 I went on a year long exchange to Kansas in the US. It was a huge thing to go away from my parents. I really grew up during those 12 months and sort of became an adult. I had so many experiences – things I never could have imagined myself doing. I made heaps of friends from all over the world and got to see a different way of life. It was just amazing. I came home much more mature. I think it created in me a thirst for travel and to get to know people and other cultures from all over the world. As soon as I got back I was like, "Wow, there is so much more out there than Tassie." Since then, my aim has been to see every continent in the world. So far I've managed Australasia, North America and Asia, although my Asian visits have been brief: I spent a night in Tokyo on the way over to Sweden and a week in Shanghai with my older sister on the way home. Going to Antarctica is my biggest dream. I actually think my high school exchange has helped me cope better with uni: I am used to being away from my parents.

Like Rebecca, Marie's first thoughts of a university exchange opportunity are prompted by a Faculty email.

I first thought about the uni exchange when the faculty sent around an email offering places. The thing that caught my attention was, "We are offering scholarships". When I went to America, everyone else did all the planning; I just turned up! Going to Sweden was the first travelling I'd done where I'd had to plan everything myself.

Marie is one of five young women from her Faculty who win scholarships to Sweden. She makes no mention of concerns, worries or difficulties organising the exchange. It is something she seems to have ‘taken in her stride’.

Being in Sweden

Marie savours her five months in Sweden – a challenge she accepts without any trepidation. It is a positive and rewarding experience, one which requires her to confront both the known and the unknown.

Sisterhood

Like Lynette and Rebecca, Marie spends time with her sibling while overseas. This is one of the highlights of her sojourn.

My little sister, Chrissy, spent all of last year on a high school exchange in Finland. I decided that if I went to Sweden, I was going to visit her; Finland is so close.

Marie pulls out a photo from the set of papers she’s been cradling on her lap. She passes it to me.

This is the only photo I’ve got of me and my sister together in Finland.

I find myself looking at two very similar, yet very different young women, a paradox that characterises many sibling photographs. Like Marie in person, the photo radiates warmth and happiness. She speaks fondly about her younger sister.

Chrissy and I are more friends than sisters. We don’t fight very often and we are really close. So, going to see her in Finland was a big part of my trip. It’s funny because we used to fight all the time when we were little, but after I came home from Kansas we got to be really good friends and we spent a lot of time together. I think it’s also because when my older sister, Jessica, returned from her exchange in Belgium, she couldn’t cope with the fact that both Chrissy and I had grown up. Jessica was always the older one, and suddenly she wasn’t the older one anymore. That kind of made Chrissy and me closer.

As one of four sisters myself, the family constellation that Marie describes resonates very strongly with me: sibling relationships are like shifting sands. Marie adopts a matter-of-fact

style in her sharing, describing what she now understands, in hindsight, as an ‘explanation’ rather than a ‘cause’ of the sibling relationship; she speaks without judgement.

Marie and Chrissy haven’t seen each other for nine months when they meet up in Finland; they are both *a bit emotional at the airport*. Marie describes the opportunity to meet Chrissy’s host family and friends, and see where she’d been living for nine months as *amazing*. This is the first contact that Chrissy has had with any members of her family since being in Finland, a direct result of her parents’ deliberate decision to not visit their children while they are overseas: *It’s your exchange. We won’t interfere*. Marie mirrors her parents’ respect in *asking first* if Chrissy is happy with her visiting.

Chrissy learnt to speak fluent Finnish, which is amazing. It was kind of strange to hear this weird language coming out of her mouth. It made me think, “Are you my sister?” But it was also nice because I didn’t have to think: she just translated everything for me, especially when we travelled around. Like, I remember we went to this place in the Arctic Circle called ‘Santa Claus Village’ in Robinini. It was so cold – minus 14 overnight. The real highlight for me was the snow. I wasn’t expecting any snow during my stay in Sweden – but I did get to see some just before I left.

Marie’s next comment causes me to reflect on the extent to which homesickness is related to people rather than places.

Once I’d been to Finland to see my sister, all my homesickness disappeared.

Marie giggles: *I probably missed my little sister more than I missed my parents!*

I’d call home when I was feeling a bit sad. We have a lot of animals on our farm, so I really missed them. Mum and dad would tell me stories about the animals and that would help me feel better. I took a few photos of my ‘babies’ to Sweden to put up on my wall. Often, after I’d finished talking to mum and dad, I’d realise that everything was still the same at home; nothing was changing. Then I’d be fine.

Being social

Like most of the participants in this study, it is social life, rather than academic life, that takes precedence in Marie’s storytelling.

Not long after we first arrived in Malmö we went to this Crayfish Festival. It's the world's biggest crayfish festival and it's been going on for hundreds of years. I think it celebrates the catching of the feast, or something. It's just one big party for ten days with lots of activities. It was really funny, they were handing out free samples of crayfish at supermarkets. How many supermarkets hand out crayfish! There were heaps and heaps of people at this festival and there were big, long tables set up. It was sort of like the finish of our induction program for the uni and the first time that the exchange students all went out as a group – 160 of us. It was a really good night; we stayed out late and we got to meet Swedish people and see a bit of the party culture of Sweden. There was this big concert with Swedish comedians doing all this strange stuff and because it was all in Swedish we had no idea what they were doing, but everyone was laughing and cheering, so we just joined in. The university provided the crayfish and we just had to provide drinks. It was kind of disappointing because, you know, in Australia we're used to having huge crayfish, and over there, they're like yabbies. Just four inches long! They take a lot of work to get a tiny little bit of meat out. But it was heaps of fun.

Yet, Marie is a realist. Although excited and motivated by overseas sojourns, she understands that the fundamentals of life continue: it isn't just about partying. *I think some people have a romantic view of travel, but you've still got to brush your teeth and hair everyday.* Learning to live in shared accommodation is perhaps her greatest experience of realism.

One of my strongest memories of being in Malmö is the accommodation we stayed in. There were 17 of us sharing one kitchen. That was a big change for me, communal living. Sometimes it was a positive experience and sometimes it wasn't. There were a few people who had cleanliness issues, but at the same time it was a great way to get to know people. You could just head out to the kitchen at whatever time and you would be guaranteed that there would be someone to sit down with and talk to, or have a coffee with. Sometimes you could just be procrastinating from school work and you'd fill in three hours in the kitchen getting to know people.

There were two Turkish boys living on our floor, so it was really interesting to hear about the Turkish culture and their views on women. They were fantastic cooks. I reckon they would cook better than most chefs here. They were amazing. It kind of didn't fit in with their views on women, though. Like, they have this idea that women are not equal, but they were fantastic cooks, and cooking is usually seen as a woman's job. Maybe it's just my stereotype.

I lived on the ninth floor, so that in itself was a big change from home. We had great views and we could see the most amazing sunsets from our building. I love sunsets. I could see right

across the city, including the bridge between Sweden and Denmark and we'd often watch the sun going down over the top of the bridge. I've got about 50 photos of sunsets from my bedroom window.

I shared my room with a German girl called Anna. It was one room, but there was a divider between us. So we got quite close, and by the end of the trip she was like family. I would consider her to be another sister now. We got on really well, which is quite amazing really, considering we're from completely different backgrounds and just got stuck in a room together. But we didn't have any problems at all. We must have similar personalities or something.

Cycling in Sweden is another communal activity in which Marie participates regularly. It is the source of new insight into an alternative cultural practice.

Cycling was another big thing that I remember. We used to cycle everywhere. It was almost the same as having the freedom of a car, but probably a lot less hassle because you didn't have to worry about petrol or parking. Often we'd walk places if it was snowing because the buses were pretty expensive. There's nothing like going out and putting 15 layers of clothes on: gloves, hat, scarf. It makes me laugh when I look at people here when they cycle and they wear all that lycra stuff. I had a bike as a kid, but Sweden was my first experience of cycling as a mode of transport.

The uni actually recommended a place to buy bikes, so we turned up there and this van pulled up out the front and this guy started unloading all these bikes from the back. We had a sneaking suspicion that a lot of them were stolen: there were only two colours – green and blue. Half the bikes in Malmo were either blue or green, and we think they were probably the stolen ones. I ended up getting a blue one from this place. I paid the equivalent of 150 Australian dollars for my second-hand bike, which is pretty expensive for a dodgy old rust-covered thing. When I first bought it I headed out to Ikea and I'd only been cycling about 10 minutes when I got a flat tyre. I took it back to the shop and complained and they fixed it for free. A lot of people had problems with their bikes. The thing I remember most about my bike was that it had a buckled, bent wheel, so when I cycled the back wheel would make this loud squeaky noise. It lasted the whole six months without falling off, but it sounded really funny when I cycled fast. It made me laugh.

Visiting Copenhagen, just a short train ride from Sweden, becomes a regular entry in Marie's social calendar. Just as for Rebecca, Copenhagen offers a welcome change from the more sedate Malmö.

We went to Copenhagen five or six times, so there are lots of good memories. It was such a different atmosphere to Malmö which is a lot smaller and quieter. When I first got to Malmö it seemed so big and strange, especially after my small home town in Tasmania, but it got sort of comfortable really quickly. It's interesting because, on the way over to Sweden, I spent a night in Japan and I was so overwhelmed by that. So many people coming and going! It was culture shock, just for one night. I guess I must have changed a lot in six months, because on the way home I stayed in Shanghai for a week with my sister and I thought it was just wonderful. I knew there were going to be lots of people and that it was going to be really different, so I sort of prepared myself for it more. I loved China. I definitely want to go back.

So, when I wanted to experience a big city and its culture while I was in Malmö, I would go to Copenhagen. The whole atmosphere there is more lively and metropolitan. There are a lot more younger people, it has nice vibe to it, and there's a great café culture. Everyone just goes out for coffee and sits around talking and enjoying themselves. There's this kind of vibe all over the whole city. It might have been related to the area we were staying in Malmö because we didn't stay in the most expensive area and we were away from the city centre. In Copenhagen, we stayed in the city centre a lot and just saw people shopping and having fun.

Yet, not all experiences of Copenhagen go according to plan.

My best time in Copenhagen was when Sarah – another girl from Tasmania – and I went for a weekend and everything turned out wrong. But it was the best time. To start with, we got to the train station early and there had been a crash on one of the tracks outside Malmö, so the trains weren't running. When we asked how long it would take to clear the tracks, they said, "Maybe half an hour, maybe tomorrow." So, we decided to wait and luckily they managed to clear it pretty quickly. We arrived in Copenhagen an hour later than expected and then went to the Carlsberg Brewery which was really cool; they have animals there. Then we decided we'd go and see where Princess Mary got married and waved from the balcony. It took us about five attempts to get the right bus stop, but we ended up seeing all sorts of different parts of the city that we weren't expecting to see.

Marie is laughing the whole time she is telling this story.

We caught the bus back and there was some kind of parade going on, so the bus had to go a completely different way. We couldn't get off in the centre of town where we'd planned, so we ended up on the other side of town. Anyway, we got off the bus and started wandering around and we looked over and there was Princess Mary sitting watching this parade! It was really funny because before we went, everyone said to us, "Make sure you say hello to Princess Mary." And there she was! We had planned to stay the night, but we couldn't find accommodation, so we ended up getting a pizza and catching a train back at midnight. So, it was like everything went completely wrong, but it was the best day. People who haven't travelled often think everything will go perfectly – they will have a great time and the weather will be great, but it isn't always like that. It doesn't always go well, and I often use the example of Copenhagen to explain that to them.

While she appreciates the value of these times in Copenhagen, she does rue lost opportunities to see more of Europe.

*But I wish I'd been able to see more places, especially more of Sweden. I did get to see Stockholm with a friend who visited from Tassie, though. Finances were a problem; travelling is so expensive. But, at the same time, it has given me an idea of what I will go and see when I get back. It is not *if*; it is **when** I go back.*

Being academic

When I mention to Marie that all the memories she has shared thus far relate to the social side of life, she laughs and says, *Yeah, the school work wasn't anything. I should talk about it, shouldn't I, because that's why I went.* Her positioning of academic life as secondary to social life is a recurring theme in this study. Yet, her academic experiences aren't negative; in fact, they are primarily positive. She is inspired to learn in Sweden.

The university had a really nice atmosphere. It was a brand new building – state of the art. Everything was up-to-date. The library had lots of windows, so it was all light and it had this atmosphere that made you want to study. There were always people studying together in groups. Students actually use the spaces there; they use the library and they make noise and have fun. No-one says, "Shhh, quiet," like they do here. They weren't disturbing other people; they were just getting into animated discussions.

Everyone there is at uni because they want to learn, so the atmosphere is really nice. Many of the students seem older, too. University is free in Sweden, so I think a lot of people go and

work for a couple of years before going to uni. Here, you sometimes get the feeling that people are at uni just to get money from the government. There's not much of a learning culture here. People are more individual, whereas there, it was more like a group effort: everyone wanted to learn. I felt comfortable just sitting in the library over there, writing up an assignment or just sitting there watching people. It was really nice.

I got better marks over there because I wanted to learn, and everyone else wanted to learn, so it kind of rubbed off on you. It was a lot easier to study in that sort of environment. Also, they have a different assignment writing style. They don't expect you to use references. In fact, they discourage you from using references. They are more interested in knowing your thoughts, what you think, rather than what someone else thinks.

I did two courses, one after the other: you only study one course at a time. The first one was 'Children's Literature in a Global Perspective'. That was really good because I've always liked books and literature, and this course covered literature from all over the world – India, Thailand, Sweden, Harry Potter, but no Australian ones. We had to write a book ourselves and present it. It made me think that maybe I'll write kids' books one day. I really enjoyed this course. There were only six contact hours each week, so it was very easy.

The only challenging experience Marie has with her academic work comes with her second elective subject, something she attributes solely to the lecturer. Yet, even this potentially negative experience Marie is able to re-position positively.

The other course I did was 'Environmental Sustainability'. That was really bad. The teacher did some really weird stuff, and I don't think it was at all well planned. Like, he only taught for a couple of days; the rest of the classes were guest lecturers or us going out and about in the community seeing different stuff. We did get to do a two week school prac., which was really good. I enjoyed that. But the prac. seemed to have no connection with the course. It seemed as though he suddenly thought, "Oh, there are two spare weeks. Let's do a prac." There was nothing specific we were meant to be doing on this prac. We just rocked up! I went to an International School. I was in a Prep/1 class and there were 14 kids from 10 different countries. Many of them spoke two or three languages. A seven year old who can speak three languages fluently? I can only speak English! It made me want to learn another language properly. I took a couple of art classes with them because I enjoy art. Because they had only been learning English for a short time, I had to speak slowly and clearly, which is good for me because I talk fast and ramble, usually! It was a good experience: we don't get a lot of cultural differences in schools here in Tasmania.

When I ask Marie what else she's learnt from the exchange, she says, *Everything. I've learnt to have a passion for life. I have always loved life, but now I can see that there is so much more. But you have to be proactive and make the most of it while you can. I have learnt to grab life with both hands. I think everyone should go on a university exchange.*

This exchange was so different from the high school one. I got to make a lot more decisions this time. If I didn't want to have a meal at a certain time, I didn't have to. If I wanted to go out without telling anyone, I could. It was good to have the experience of more freedom.

Being home

While Marie experiences some discomfort from re-entry, her experience is, in comparison with the other participants in this study, relatively positive. She attributes this relative ease of adjustment to her prior overseas sojourn and subsequent realistic expectations. Being home, then, confirms what Marie expects, but it also illuminates some latent perspectives.

Been there, done that

Marie claims that coming home hasn't been *hard at all* because she's *been through the whole process before*. While realistic expectations might result in greater ease of adjustment for Marie (Bochner & Furnham, 1986), she still must navigate the pathways of changed relationship patterns and living arrangements.

After two months

The suddenness and permanency of the ending of the temporary sojourn relationship is one of the few things that Marie finds difficult. Such feelings of loss and separation, as well as nostalgia for a lost way of life, have been shown to characterise other student sojourners' re-entry experiences as well (see, for example, Werkman, 1980).

Sometimes when I look at photos now, I think, "Was I really in Sweden?" It kind of doesn't seem real. I really miss just being able to walk into the kitchen and have three or four people to talk to. They're suddenly gone and that's kind of hard. I miss seeing people I saw everyday for six months.

After four months

Despite such early feelings of loss, Marie recognises the reality of the situation after four months home.

Coming home, I knew what to expect and I also thought that, even if I did want to go back to Sweden, it wouldn't be the same because there would be new exchange students there and I wouldn't know any of these people and they would be living in my room and that kind of stuff.

Marie's comment is reminiscent of Kate's – another participant in this study – whose sense of isolation and nostalgia changed once her exchange cohort physically left the exchange site. Marie is able to hypothesise and project these feelings of disconnectedness; Kate has to experience it before she understands it.

Once again, Marie draws comparisons with her high school exchange.

It was a lot less personal than having to leave a family, like I did in high school, so I haven't found coming home this time hard at all.

She giggles and shakes her head.

But, I have found it a little bit hard living with my parents again. I think that's more to do with an age thing and being more mature and independent and not wanting to rely on them for everything. I actually moved back home just before I went to Sweden, and it got to the stage where I thought it was either move out, or go overseas! I chose overseas, which was moving out as well, so I think coming home I felt those same emotions coming back again. It's not that my parents put any pressure on me – they are really understanding, and they're not horrible, or anything – it's just like I feel the need to spread out a bit. I've got lots of stuff and I would like to have a house. I'm grown up and I can't cope with having them around any more. So, I think any problems are sort of coming from me, and not from them. They don't put any pressure on me and they don't mind if I go out all night and don't call them, but I sort of feel that it is my responsibility, like, I have to answer to them because I have for so long, for all of my life, really.

A unique aspect of Marie's re-entry experience is that while she is experiencing re-entry herself – for a second time – she is watching her younger sister experience re-entry – for the first time. Her sister arrives home from her exchange two days prior to Marie. Re-entry is layered upon re-entry.

It's been interesting watching my little sister struggle with coming home from Finland because she's really had a lot of trouble fitting back in. She doesn't like home and she doesn't like school. She's cried quite a lot and mum and dad have tried to comfort her. She's found it kind of hard to have her independence taken away because in Finland she could get on a bike and cycle into town. It took her two minutes! She could go shopping and hang out with friends and stuff. Whereas here, we live out in the country, and she just doesn't have that same freedom. She has to get someone to take her everywhere. But, she's recently got her driver's licence, so that will help. She just wants to go home to Finland.

I am interested to hear Marie refer to Finland as her sister's *home*. Watching her younger sister struggle with re-entry provides a valuable point of reference for Marie in terms of her own feelings.

I remember thinking, "Oh, I'm not having any of those feelings." For me, it was just, "Oh, home again. What will I do now?" I don't consider Sweden home; it was more of a nice place to stay for six months. A lot of the stuff she's going through, is exactly what I went through when I came back from America. I think it has to do with the fact that when you're on a high school exchange, you're living with a family for a year, and they become your family, you know, and the family you left behind, you just kind of put them out of your mind so that you don't have to feel too sad about them. Then when you come home, it's "Uh oh." You don't know whether you'll ever see your host family again, but you know you'll see your family in Australia again.

This is the second time that Marie has mentioned the comparative difficulty of leaving a family when concluding an overseas sojourn. In the re-entry literature, quality time spent with a host culture family overseas has been correlated with greater re-entry difficulty (Rorlich & Martin, 1991). Marie's comments suggest that this was one cause of her increased re-entry difficulty when she was 16.

In many ways, Marie plays, for her sister, the same role her university exchange peers play for her in re-entry – a shared, common experience that facilitates discourse, empathy and understanding.

I guess it's been a bit easier for her, and for me, too, in the way that we can talk to each other because I went to see her in Finland, and if she wants to talk about something I can put it in context. My parents just leave us to talk it through.

I still see the other four girls I went to Sweden with all the time. We are really good friends. We can share special little moments that when you try and explain to other people, they just don't get it – little inside jokes like, we had these sayings, one of them was, "You've got rabbits." Everyone else goes, "What?" It is something one of the Swedish guys said to us; we were complaining about something in Sweden and he said, "Well, you've got rabbits in Australia!" Other people just don't get it. It would be different if I didn't have the support of the other girls who went as well. We can just talk about it for half an hour, and if someone else was listening they'd wonder what on earth we were talking about.

Marie proceeds to speak in a 'detached', although certainly not uncompassionate way, about her re-entry experience. She identifies many of the specific, stereotypical behaviour patterns of family members and friends during re-entry, behaviours consistently identified in literature (see, for example, Storti, 2001; Weaver, 1994). In many ways, her comments reflect a capacity to be both observer of, as well as participant in, her own cross-cultural experience. This capacity Ballard (1981) and Weaver (1994) describe as characterising many returning sojourners.

It's a lot easier having done it a second time, and being older. It means you can appreciate more the feelings of people around you when you come home. You can kind of see how they are feeling about you coming home. It's interesting to look at the stages that people go through. Like, you know there are the first couple of days where they are all excited and jubilant, and then it returns to the same old, same old. That was interesting, this time, watching the emotions of people around me. For the first couple of weeks people asked about our exchange, but you can only tell them so much in words.

The difficulty inherent in sharing such non-verbal qualities of an overseas sojourn has also been highlighted by Werkman (1980). Much of an overseas sojourn remains intangible.

My parents have had lots of experience with their girls coming home because we've all been on exchange. They're old pros at it now! I think if my parents couldn't accept it, then it would be a lot harder.

Marie's final comment further reinforces the symbiotic nature of relationships during re-entry: others' responses to the returnee have direct impact on both the duration and quality of the re-entry experience. Re-entry is not a sole endeavour or process. Marie's comments also demonstrate a capacity to consider others' feelings and responses to her re-entry; she is not

operating from a solely egocentric perspective. This stands in contrast to many other participants in this study, who, after four months home, were more focussed on the impact of others' behaviour on them.

After six months

Two months later, Marie is even more convinced of the correlation between previous re-entry experience and adjustment.

I didn't expect everything to be the same when I came home, because I sort of knew from experience that it wouldn't be. I knew everything would be quite different. My experience is different from other people's in that I have been through the emotions of coming home before, and so I sort of knew what to expect. I knew that it would be a bit difficult, and that people would be interested for the first couple of weeks and then just forget about it. I think other people expected that I would talk to them about the exchange, and I have done that. One of the most interesting things is that people want to see my photos all the time. But they look at them and just flick through really quickly, like they don't sort of 'get' anything. I say, "Wait, wait, this one!" There is a story behind each photo and they just flick through them, like they just want to seem polite. I don't know what it is. But now I don't give them the photo album: I make sure I sit with them, I control the pages and I make them listen to the stories. I know from looking at other people's photos, it's not anywhere as interesting if you just look and say, "That looks like a nice building."

I'm settled back in and I haven't had any issues in the last couple of months. Yep, it's all good. I think it helps that finishing uni is something I've got to look forward to. I've got so much happening and finishing uni is something I have been working towards for such a long time. I can almost hold it. I know I am finally going to make it. I am like, whoa, I will be able to, you know, go out into the schools and teach in September! I guess having that to focus on, helps.

Like Rebecca, Marie finds that having a goal (completing her university degree) helps maintain a focus and consequently diverts some attention from the process of re-entry.

The new old me

Marie shows a remarkable maturity in her capacity to self-reflect. This is something she attributes primarily to her experience of living in Sweden, but also, in part, to her teacher education: *I guess the teaching degree has sort of helped because it is all about reflection and*

that kind of stuff and so I have internalised all that. She reflects openly and insightfully on how she's changed as a result of the exchange, a perception that often escapes many sojourners in the initial stages of their re-entry, in particular (see, for example, Martin, 1984; Scheiber, 2000).

Marie recognises that the person who came home from Sweden is different to the person who went. Some of this change she attributes to the outcomes of communal living in Sweden. She has a heightened awareness of change, primarily because it stands in stark contrast to her previous exchange. I'm fascinated by the number of cross-references Marie makes to her high school exchange. It is the source of constant comparison in her discussion of her most recent re-entry.

After two months

I always used to be sort of quiet, and I used to keep to myself a lot. When I was away I found that I had to be a lot more 'out there' and more confident. So, I sort of started off pretending and then I kind of woke up one morning and I was like, "Oh, this is me now." It's good. I think it's kind of like who I was before I came home from exchange in America. It was like I was sort of depressed for a couple of years when I came home from America. Now I'm thinking that I'm back to my old self again, so that's good. I think I'm a lot more outgoing and happy. It's good; I like being happy.

I've definitely become more tolerant and open to different personalities and cultures and just accepting people for who they are, and not where they come from or what they do. When you have to learn to fit in with 17 different personalities in one room, you have to learn to give and take a little.

After four months

Marie remains convinced of her early re-entry self-appraisal of being a changed person. Like Kate – another participant in this study – Marie's friendship pattern changes during re-entry, a phenomenon well supported in the literature (see, for example, Lank, 1985; Wilson, 1993c).

I've found that I've made quite a few new friends here at uni: people in my year in Education that I've never spoken with before. I talk to a lot more people now and try to get to know them. I'm more drawn to people who have a similar sense of humour to mine, so when we get together it's great; we have lots of laughs.

I can look back now and see that I am now more like the person I was before I went to America in high school. I don't know if it's an American thing, but I kind of lost my sense of humour while I was there, and when I came back home I took life too seriously and myself too seriously for a couple of years. Now, I think, "Lightly. Lighten up a bit." Going to Sweden has helped me to bring that out.

I am so much more confident now. I honestly don't care what other people think of me; it is their problem, not mine. I used to worry about that kind of stuff, but now I think, "Well, if they've got a problem with me, they're not worth my time, they can have their problem with me, and it's not going to affect me at all." I think it's a Swedish thing, almost. The Swedish people I met are so confident. They don't care if they go nude on a beach or wear strange clothes. They just don't care. Life is too short to worry about what other people think, because if you do, you're going to spend your whole life shut in a room, and I definitely don't want to do that. So, I've got a new perspective and a new confidence in myself. I think it's also related to the fact that in Sweden I got used to not knowing very many people where I was going.

Marie's last comment is reminiscent of James's – another participant in this study – who revels in the freedom that accompanied anonymity in a different country.

So, I'm a bit more comfortable with being a little bit silly sometimes and doing stupid things. Like, we had to do this play yesterday for Drama, and I turned up with pink, frizzy pigtails in my hair and wearing my pyjamas. I remember thinking, "Oh, well, it doesn't matter. I'm comfy in my pyjamas!"

Marie laughs out loud.

I don't think I would have felt comfortable doing that before I went away. I also used to tend to road rage before I left; I was really bad. But I've been pretty good since I got back. The other day I had a few moments of rage, and then I thought, "Wait a second; it doesn't matter if I am five minutes late. At least I'll still get there." I was in a car accident a couple of weeks ago with my flat mate. Definitely no more road rage for me! So, yeah, I haven't noticed my self slipping back into any of those old habits. I think my parents have noticed the change in me. They have said, "You're a lot happier now." I don't think it's something that's going to wear off. I think that what I've got now is being internalised. I still feel the same way after four months home. I guess I'm just really lucky that my parents have travelled a lot, so they

know what it's like, and they've always just accepted me for who I am and if I change, there is no judgement with it.

While I suspect, from Marie's commentary thus far, that her parents have been consistently non-judgemental in their parenting style, I do wonder to what extent a particular phenomenon described in the re-entry literature has impacted upon their recent relationship with Marie: that is, parents often exhibit an enhanced level of respect for their children's recently-acquired independence (Lank, 1985; Martin, 1986; Raschio, 1987).

After six months

Like Rebecca, Marie highlights increased flexibility as an outcome of her overseas exchange. After six months, her increased confidence is still evident and is, according to Marie, a permanent change.

I'm more of a 'take it as it comes' type of person now. I think, ok, that's going to happen today, and I can deal with that today, and who knows what's going to happen tomorrow. So, my philosophy is 'take each day as it comes'. If it doesn't work out, that's ok because there's always tomorrow. I think I've become much more flexible since going away because I've realised that even the best laid plans don't always work out. Take it as it comes, rather than planning down to the last detail.

*I always used to be a bit paranoid and think, "Does my hair look ok? Are my trousers the right ones?"— all that kind of stuff. But there are lots of other things to worry about, so I just don't worry about that anymore. I really liked the way of life in Sweden. They just did whatever they wanted and felt really comfortable about that. Everyone says Australia is very laid back, but it's not really. Australia is still quite conservative. Sweden is very liberal. It's not something they promote: it's sort of a *sense* you get from being there. I immersed myself in that and it felt good. I really liked it. At first it was a conscious thing, you know, I thought, "I'm going to make this part of my life", and then I was just doing it without consciously thinking about it. Since I've been home, it's been the same. I've still got my confidence and that feeling after six months.*

Marie refers to a university presentation she makes as evidence of her increased confidence. Unlike many other student sojourners cited in the re-entry literature (see, for example, Howell, 2002; Wilson, 1993b), Marie's experience is validated and respected (at an administrative level, at least) by her university upon her return.

I spoke at a dinner recently for the uni. It was promoting exchanges. The Dean was there, and the Vice Chancellor and all these school principals, important people, you know. Everyone was talking about it, and I went in and thought, “They’re just people. If they don’t like what I say, they won’t ask me to speak again.” It was good. I really enjoyed it. But I didn’t think it was a big thing. I know that before, I would have.

As with other aspects of Marie’s reflection on her re-entry, she is able to focus on the impact of her behaviour on others, thus illustrating a capacity for an ‘allocentric’ approach (Triandis et al., 1985).

*I find that I listen to my friends a lot more now – actually, **really** listen, not just pretend to be listening. I think part of the reason is that I’ve been doing research on Aboriginal schools and their way of life. They focus on listening to a person and then stopping, thinking, and then answering. Not thinking of the answer while you are listening.*

I really like that, so I’ve tried to incorporate that into my thinking. I found in Sweden that it was quite similar to that as well. People actually listened to you and didn’t just ask because it was polite. They genuinely wanted to know the answer. I think if I can put that into my life it will be really good.

Introducing new values is a well documented difficulty of re-entry (see, for example, Storti, 2000; Uehara, 1986). Yet, unlike many returnees who experience dissonance as a result of contrasting values, Marie finds the transition to more confident person and to more effective listener an easy one, ostensibly because neither is challenging for those around her.

A new way of seeing

Marie ‘sees’ things at home during the first six months of her re-entry that she couldn’t see before: *I just notice things more, now*. This newly acquired perspective on her own life and on others’ lives, is a result of literal and metaphoric distance – in time, space and experience.

After four months

Marie demonstrates a new capacity for ‘isomorphic attribution’ – an ability to understand and attribute causes of another person’s behaviour, in a way similar to them (Triandis, 1975).

I learnt to live with so many different personalities and cope with people I normally wouldn’t speak to in real life, so I came to understand about looking at where they were coming from.

*So now, with other people, like my parents, I think to myself, “Am I reacting to this because of what they’re saying, or because of what other experiences have happened to me?” I don’t remember having those same thoughts before I went away. Sometimes I think that I think too much; I kind of analyse stuff now. Before I went away I was just so excited about getting ready to go, that I wasn’t thinking about anyone else around me. Now that I’ve come home, I’m more used to having to consider other people around me. I consider what they might be feeling and what their emotions might be. I often ask myself, “Why did I do that?” I guess the teaching degree has helped with that because of its focus on reflection. So, I must have internalised all that. I actually **do** look at things that I do, and think about what I could do differently next time. But I also look at my friends and think, “Why did they do that?” I often wonder what motivates them and what kind of reasoning is behind what they’re doing. I think I can see people more clearly after having been away from them for six months and only having written contact with them. Like, I can look at a person and think to myself, “I’ve never noticed that before.”*

In support of this prior lack of perception, Marie goes on to describe her changed perspectives on two long-term friends.

I have a really good friend. We’ve been friends since grade 11. Now that I’ve come back I can see that she is exactly the same person she was in high school. She hasn’t moved on and continued that growth. She’s bought a house right next door to her parents. She’s very closed off to any new experiences; she’s not interested. She’s got her own little world which involves going to work half an hour away, and helping her mum and dad on the farm. That’s all her life. She doesn’t go out and socialise and I think it’s really sad. I think, well, I’ve had so many experiences that have just made me...

Marie exhales loudly.

...you know, this huge person with ideas and perspectives. I wish she could get away and travel a bit and see that her life is not the only way to live, and that she could do things – heaps of things – because she is so intelligent. But she only works as a secretary in a furniture store, so it’s not exactly riveting work. There is so much potential in her, but she doesn’t do anything. It’s interesting comparing her with another friend I’ve been friends with since grade 1. She has travelled a lot, like me, and the differences between the two of them! I don’t know whether it is just the influence of seeing other cultures and other things that broadens your ideas and perspectives on everything. I find I can relate much more to this friend now.

Marie's preference for relating to her well-travelled friend is consistently documented in the re-entry literature as characterising returnees' friendship patterns (see, for example, Butcher, 2002; Lank, 1985).

Marie goes on to describe *another good guy friend* about whom she *always thought very highly*, but, since being home, *not anymore*. Her new lack of respect for him relates to his *irresponsib[ility]*. At 22 years of age, and still living with his mother, Marie feels cross that he absolves himself of responsibilities like *washing and cooking*. She says, *I never saw that before, and now I can see it. I can't help thinking, "I don't like you anymore." I've only spoken with him once or twice since I've been home because I just can't handle being around him. He is just so irresponsible and immature. I think it's kind of sad because we were quite good friends before I left*. She justifies her new attitude by pointing out that she *can't stand irresponsible people, after having to look after [her]self for so long*.

Marie's discussion becomes more personal and intimate as the focus moves to one of her best friends.

I guess one of the big things I never noticed before is one of my best friends – she's been married for ages and is quite a bit older than me – I never realised what a bad relationship she and her husband have. I can see it so clearly now. He is so nasty to her, and I never saw it. I don't feel as if it's my place to say anything, but I can see it when I go around there. It is really hard.

Marie's eyes suddenly well with tears and she speaks through broken sobs. I am taken aback at the sudden and unexpected change of emotion.

The worst thing is I don't think she can see it. So that is really hard. I guess she's had to put up with it for so long. I often compare their relationship with my parents' relationship because my parents have the best relationship. Like, they get angry, but they're never nasty to each other. Whereas, the things he says to her...I never noticed that before. Now, I'm like, "Whoa, how did I miss that?" But anyway, we won't talk about that anymore.

Marie averts her eyes, uncomfortable about displaying such emotion. It is a brief, yet intense juxtaposition with the happy-go-lucky, jovial Marie presented thus far. I can't help wondering what else lay behind this show of emotion, but she changes direction in her discussion, shedding no more light on her married friend or her response to the situation.

I find that I don't have time anymore for people that annoy me. I now think, "Well, I don't like you, and I don't have to spend time with you, so I am not going to." I feel that if I spend time with them, it's just a waste of my time, and I may as well be doing stuff that I enjoy. It's all about doing things that I think will help me in the future and if, you know, I can see that relationships aren't going to work out so well, I will just save myself the heartache now and just get rid of them and not think about it. I now look at different things from this wide knowledge base that I have discovered.

Marie's new found ability to see hitherto latent issues extends beyond people to the physical environment. Like Lynette, Rebecca and James (other participants in this study), she has returned with a deeper appreciation of the Tasmanian environment.

I've also realised how much I love this country. I love Australia and I love Tassie. I guess I can look at it now from how tourists see it. We've got such potential for tourists here, the clean, green atmosphere. More and more people are looking for that, so I can see how special Tassie is going to be in the future tourist industry. I'm so much more aware of little things, like gum trees. I love gum trees and I never realised how much you can miss them. They are such a big part of our scenery.

After six months

My friend who used to sponge off his mum came to visit the other day, and he's actually grown up a bit in the last couple of months. I think it's because his mum has been quite sick and he's had to look after her. I haven't seen him in a couple of months and I can see now that he's finally starting to be a bit more responsible. I've been friends with him for four or five years, and I'd just got used to the way he was – just accepted it and not looked at it as being good or bad, just the way it was. But after having a break, I could kind of see it with new eyes. I remember thinking, "Geez, you were always like that, and I just put up with it!"

Marie attempts to explain why she now has this capacity to see friends afresh.

I guess going away and only having written or spoken contact with people – not actually seeing them – but yet at the same time, seeing so many new things and having new experiences and looking at new and different ways of life and how other people act, meant I then sort of compared this overall picture of people to this specific person and I looked at his behaviour, thinking, "You shouldn't be doing that. You should be more responsible." It's like I have a broader perspective on people, but I'm not actually judging them – you know,

judging in the sense of right or wrong – they're just different. I mean, I can make a judgement on the basis of my new knowledge.

Return to darkness

The aspect of re-entry that appears to be most challenging for Marie is reintegrating into university life. This difficulty in adapting is a direct result of her contrasting academic experience in Sweden.

After four months

I'd forgotten the atmosphere that the uni here has. It's just not a nice place to be. I hate coming to uni here. It is kind of depressing in a way. I don't know; it might be the weather as well, but the buildings are all kind of drab and square and grey and old. And it's always so cold inside here. I can't stand that. It really annoys me. It makes me want to move somewhere warm. In Sweden, it was cold outside, but always heated nicely inside. The library! Every time I go into the library I get hay fever from the dust on the books. It's just not a nice learning atmosphere. There was such a great atmosphere in the library in Sweden. It had huge windows and let in so much light. The whole library was full of light. The one thing I noticed after being in Sweden is that I love light; I love sunshine. Like here, there are two or three windows and that's it. It's so dark and depressing in there. I would much rather study at home where I can sit in the sunshine and have a nice atmosphere around.

Her disquietude relates to pedagogy as well as resources.

I'm finding it hard to concentrate in big group lectures here now because we didn't have any at all in Sweden. I start thinking about writing letters to people, then I remember I'm meant to be listening. Also, it is so dark where we have to sit and take notes and I don't like darkness anymore. It makes you feel tired sitting in the dark listening to someone drone on and on without a break. When I was in Sweden there were interactive tutorials that were so much more engaging. You learn so much more out of being able to have discussions with the person who is speaking and saying, "But hang on, what did you mean by that?" Some of the tutors we've had this year have been very substandard: I think you would have to call them dodgy. They just don't have that interaction with you. They just stand up there and preach at you. Sometimes I think, "Oh, I could have slept in this morning." I find I actually learn more now from sitting down in the café with a group of, you know, six or seven people, and discussing stuff. I'm more proactive about speaking to other people and getting their ideas and not just sludging away in the dark by myself. I've also been doing a lot more group

planning, especially for internship. I find I get so much more done doing it off my own back than having uni say, "Do this; do that." I never used to do that. I would just do assignments and hand them in. Whereas now, I like to see what other people are thinking. I contribute ideas as well and it helps them to see in different ways which is really good.

Marie's words echo those of Rebecca, who attended the same university in Sweden.

In Sweden you felt more valued as both a person and as an intellectual. Lecturers over there think your opinion really matters. It doesn't matter how stupid you think your comment might be, everyone else will listen and will comment. It helps you to think, "Well, maybe it wasn't so stupid after all because everyone else was thinking the same." Not once did I ever get the impression that the lecturer thought something was a really bad idea. Whereas here, I get the impression that some lecturers think that if you don't do things their way, it's not right. I really liked the openness between lecturers and students in Sweden. Both my high school and college in Tasmania were very conservative, so I never got to have that sort of discussion. I didn't like college at all – didn't want to be there, wasn't interested, so didn't participate. Now I am interested and want to give my opinion.

Re-engaging in university life in her home culture is clearly a frustrating experience for Marie. This concurs with much of the re-entry literature which reveals that student sojourner relationships with academic institutions tend to be experienced more negatively than positively, often a result of the home culture institution's lack of interest in, and respect for, the returnees' new knowledge and skills (see, for example, Howell, 2002; Wilson, 1985, 1993a, 1993b). For Marie, the frustration lay specifically in her incapacity to have her academic 'voice' heard. Her initial satisfaction with her home culture institution in the early stages of her re-entry – a result of being invited by the Vice-Chancellor to speak about her exchange – is soon eroded by the day-to-day realities of this 'silencing'.

Final words

Marie's final words reflect the extent to which her identity is now tied to her traveller status.

I think I'm going to be broke for a very long time because I will spend all my money on travel. I've realised I will always live in Australia: I can't see myself living anywhere else. But at the same time, I can see myself travelling for two or three months at a time.

If people don't know I'd been overseas it's like cutting half of me off. It's such a big part of me; it has shaped who I am and all my thoughts and ideas, and if people don't know that I've been overseas, then they don't see the full picture. It is just like they are looking at this faded person; they don't see all the colourful bits. It's like the difference between seeing in colour and black and white. If you see in black and white you miss out on so much detail and patterning. If people don't know I've been overseas then they are seeing me in black and white.

If I think about what it's been like coming home, I'd say it's like one of those little books that has a secret compartment in the middle. You know, you have this great book full of all these experiences and people can see the book sitting on the shelf. But when I open it I see all this other stuff inside that I haven't talked to other people about.

As Marie gathers her things together at the end of this last interview, and we chat informally about her upcoming internship on the wild and remote west coast of Tasmania, I fleetingly wonder whether her metaphor of a secret compartment in a book has been stimulated by her study of children's literature in Sweden. We move towards my office door and stop to look at the Peter's Projection world map on the wall, joking about her recent movement from the 'top' to the 'bottom' of the world – from 55 degrees latitude north, to 42 degrees latitude south. I ask how much experience she's had with Tasmania's west coast. She claims to know what to expect. Accurate perception or not, I trust Marie will take it all in her stride, nonetheless. I smile and wish her luck.

Making meaning

How prior experience affected the re-entry

Like all other participants in this study, Marie's prior experiences had a direct influence on her re-entry experience; her re-entry is not a phenomenon that can be credibly considered in isolation. In Marie's case, like Lynette's and Joseph's, prior experiences included those not only directly linked to her most recent sojourn in Sweden, but also those that occurred well before her time in Sweden. In particular, it was her childhood experience, as a 16 year old, of a year long exchange in the USA, combined with her experience in Sweden – namely, the tertiary education system, their *liberal* lifestyle, and her consequent broadened world view – that shaped and influenced many aspects of her re-entry experience.

An explicit and consistent topic of discussion in Marie's narrative was her expectations of re-entry. She was able to predict accurately many aspects of her re-entry experience. This she attributed exclusively to her prior overseas exchange as a 16 year old. Comments such as: *I've been through the whole process before; I knew what to expect; and I didn't expect everything to be the same when I came home, because I sort of knew from experience that it wouldn't be* exemplified her awareness of expectations as a critical component of the re-entry experience. Particularly noteworthy was the fact that the accuracy of Marie's expectations extended beyond generalised feelings of *know[ing] what to expect*, to specific identification of behaviour patterns in others such as, *I knew that... people would be interested for the first couple of weeks and then just forget about it, and the first couple of days [people] are all excited and jubilant, and then it returns to the same old, same old*. Such specific and realistic expectations suggest that Marie, like Joseph, reflected upon, and internalised, many aspects of her previous re-entry experience. This stands in contrast to Lynette whose high school exchange experience, albeit briefer in duration, did not seem to prepare her well for her second re-entry.

The ultimate outcome of Marie having realistic expectations was that her re-entry was less stressful and less personally challenging than it otherwise might have been. This is an outcome well documented in literature over the last half century (see, for example, Janis, 1958; Martin & Harrell, 2004). Furthermore, realistic expectations meant that Marie could be more cognisant of, and responsive to, others' experiences of her re-entry. This arguably reduced the challenges others experienced as a result of her re-entry and therefore conceivably contributed to more harmonious relations: *It's a lot easier having done it a second time, and being older. It means you can appreciate more the feelings of people around you*. Interestingly, for Lynette and Rebecca, this realisation of others' perspectives took much longer to emerge.

Over the first six months of her re-entry, Marie's realistic expectations were affirmed; they were not 'violated' (Burgoon & Walther, 1990). In other words, what she predicted, was exactly what she experienced. Such realistic expectations result in the reduction of uncertainty. This reduction in uncertainty – "one of the principal theoretical processes related to adjustment" (Black, 1992, p. 178) – undoubtedly led to greater ease of adjustment during re-entry for Marie, personally and relationally.

Adding to Marie's reduction of uncertainty, and subsequent level of comfort with her own re-entry experience, was her observation of her sister's re-entry experience. She identified a number of parallels with her own high school re-entry: *A lot of the stuff she's going through,*

is exactly what I went through when I came back from America, but more particularly, her sister's experience provided a valuable point of comparison for what she was currently experiencing herself during her most recent re-entry: *I remember thinking, "Oh, I'm not having any of those feelings."* On numerous occasions Marie made reference to the relative ease of leaving her communal living situation in Sweden – a place she *didn't consider home* – compared with her own previous, and her sister's, experience of leaving a host family. This observation of her sister's re-entry, during her own re-entry, provided Marie with a unique opportunity to make sense of her own experience. Realistic expectations, then, borne from prior experience, impacted directly on the affective and cognitive domains of Marie's re-entry experience.

Equally influential in shaping Marie's re-entry was her experience in Sweden. In terms of her experience in the Swedish tertiary education system, she *wanted to learn*, not only because of the *great atmosphere* in the buildings, but more particularly because of the *interactive* and *engaging* pedagogy. Like Rebecca, she *felt more valued both as a person and as an intellectual* in this environment. In contrast, the *darkness* of the buildings and perceived devaluing of her opinion by lecturers who *th[ought] that if you don't do things their way, it's not right*, determined, to a large extent, Marie's disappointment and frustration with her home culture university. Such disappointment and consequent lack of motivation with tertiary education have been highlighted as characteristic of returning student sojourners in previous re-entry literature (Howell, 2002; Lank, 1985). The perceived inadequacies of Marie's own culture's tertiary education system had, then, been highlighted through comparison with her host culture's system. While the implications of this comparison were not dire – in the sense that she considered withdrawing from university, for example – it did impact on the qualitative nature of her re-entry; it affected her affectively, behaviourally and cognitively.

Affectively, university life was the primary aspect of re-entry about which Marie felt a genuine sense of unhappiness. Behaviourally and cognitively, Marie avoided attending the university campus whenever possible and made deliberate attempts to engage in group discussion, a clear indication of her enhanced awareness of meta-cognitive strategies. It took conscious effort on Marie's part to remain committed to her academic studies and this was achieved primarily through focussing on her ultimate goal – graduating: *finishing uni is something I have been working towards for such a long time. I can almost hold it...having that to focus on, helps*. Marie's reappraisal of the quality of her home culture university and her consequent experience of it, was stimulated and informed by her overseas university experience. Without her Swedish academic experience, her home culture university life

would most likely have remained unquestioned and her re-entry experience virtually tension-free.

A discernible aspect of Swedish culture that impacted directly on Marie's re-entry experience was its *liberal[ism]*. Described as a *Swedish thing* – a *sense you [got] from being there* – Marie identified the Swedes' confidence in *go[ing] nude on a beach* or *wear[ing] strange clothes* as influencing her new-found confidence at home. She no longer *car[ed] what other people th[ought] of [her]*. Exemplified by wearing *pink, frizzy pigtails* and *comfy pyjamas* to a class presentation – something Marie would *not have felt comfortable doing before [she] went away* – she claimed her new-found confidence and loss of previous *paranoi[a]*, a permanent change after six months home. Exposure to an alternative culture, then, at first stimulating a conscious act of mimicry, ultimately resulted in an unconscious, *internalised* and permanent assimilation of a way of being in her home culture. Marie's capacity to sustain this *feeling* and level of *confidence* in her home culture determined a *happier* re-entry, something apparent to external observers, such as her parents, as well.

The final way in which Marie's Swedish experience impacted upon her re-entry was in terms of her broadened world view, a common outcome of most overseas sojourns (see, for example, Adler, 1975; Smith, 2002b). Marie was herself aware of this broadened outlook on life: *I've had so many experiences that have just made me, you know, this huge person with ideas and perspectives*. These experiences while based in Sweden – some day-to-day and some celebratory, some fun and some challenging, and standing in contrast to her previous isolated, rural lifestyle – highlighted alternative ways of being. Together, they created a cultural bricolage: communal and apartment living, cycling, community engagement, Danish and Finnish travel, festivals and concerts. That Marie would consequently have a new canvas for interpreting life is clear.

Such an enhanced perspective can be the source of tension in re-entry circumstances where competing values, for example, cause relational dissent. This has been a finding in this study and many previous re-entry studies (see, for example, Brabant et al., 1990; Uehara, 1986). For Marie, there was clearly a level of discomfort from recognising, for the first time, the dysfunctional nature of one of her close friend's spousal relationship. Yet, a broadened world view had a primarily positive impact on Marie's re-entry: it made the previously invisible, visible. She was able to analyse and understand others' behaviour – *see it with new eyes* – as a direct result of *having been away from them for six months and only having written contact*. This capacity to see things afresh was something she perceived as beneficial in her life, something that allowed her to *make a judgement on the basis of [her] new knowledge*. She

would consciously decide, on the basis of this heightened awareness, with whom she wished to spend time: *I find that I don't have time anymore for people that annoy me. If I spend time with them, it's just a waste of my time.* In essence, Marie's broadened world view resulted in her being more mindful of, and adopting a more critical perspective towards, personal and institutional behaviours in her home culture during her re-entry. This she found *confidence-building* and it undoubtedly contributed to her sense of well-being during re-entry.

Themes emerging from the narrative

Reflective observation

A dominant theme to emerge from Marie's narrative relates to reflective observation: both her capacity to engage meaningfully in the process – *I kind of analyse stuff now* – and the positive outcomes resulting from this reflective observation process during her re-entry – *now I'm thinking that I'm back to my old self again, so that's good.* Reflection, defined by Schön (1983) as a reframing of perceptions, was not only a pragmatic tool for Marie, in the sense that it allowed her to make sense of her own and others' behaviour; it allowed her also to make informed choices, something that was clearly experienced by Marie as empowering. This raised "aware[ness] of [one's] own power of agency" is, according to Brookfield (1995, p. 217), an outcome of participating in the process of reflection.

Marie herself identified both her Swedish experience – *I don't remember having those same thoughts before I went away* – and her education degree – *the teaching degree has helped with...its focus on reflection* – as promoting her reflective capacity. As a result of engaging in reflective observation during re-entry, Marie was able to make sense of her sister's, and consequently her own, affective response to re-entry, and reappraise aspects of her friends' behaviours – *I never saw that before, and now I can see it* – both of which have already been discussed earlier in this section. Yet Marie's reflective capacity extended beyond analysing and understanding others; she also engaged in self-reflection.

Marie's self-reflection was multi-faceted. It included recognising the extent to which she had been shaped by her overseas experience: *it has shaped who I am and all my thoughts and ideas.* It also included learning to 'own' her own behaviour by making conscious choices about, and recognising the impact of, her behaviour on others: *I actually **do** look at things that I do, and think about what I could do differently next time.* For example, she made a conscious decision to genuinely *listen* to others, something she was aware that she hadn't been doing prior to re-entry. She began as well, to *understand about looking at where [others] were coming from.* Furthermore, she reflected on the extent to which perceived problems

were more about her than others: in relation to her desire to move out of her parents' home she commented, *I think any problems are sort of coming from me, and not from them.*

Marie's process of self-reflection during re-entry, then, had breadth as well as depth. Yet, perhaps the most profound way in which self-reflection impacted upon Marie's re-entry was in her reappraisal of her own personality.

It is common for sojourners to be unaware that they've changed when they re-enter their own culture (see, for example, Martin, 1984; Scheiber, 2000). Marie, however, was acutely aware of her personality changes, right from the beginning of her re-entry period. She recognised that, as a result of communal living in Sweden she had become more *tolerant* and *flexible*. She also identified herself during re-entry as being *kind of like who [she] was before [she] came home from exchange in America* – more *confident* and *outgoing*, and having a greater *sense of humour*. She felt *good* and *happy* about this return to old ways and attributed the change primarily to her time in Sweden: *going to Sweden has helped me to bring that out* – because she had to learn to interact constantly with people she didn't know. Returning to her home culture – to familiar contexts and routines – provided Marie with a comparative backdrop against which to reappraise her personality. Instrumental in recognising and nurturing these personality changes were her family and friends.

Social support

The unconditional support afforded Marie by her family – her parents, in particular – undergirded her entire re-entry experience. Described by Marie as *really understanding*, *accept[ing]*, and having *the best relationship*, her parents were *old pros* at both travel and managing returnees as a result of their own prior experiences. In particular, Marie acknowledged their consistent acceptance of her *for who [she was]*. If she changed, there was *no judgement* from her parents. Added to this, both Marie's sisters had experienced, or currently were experiencing, re-entry and were able to relate to the socio-psychological process inherent during such a transition. In reference to her younger sister's re-entry she commented, *I guess it's been a bit easier for her, and for me, too, in the way that we can talk to each other*. This level of familial support undoubtedly contributed to Marie's dominant sense of well-being during re-entry.

In a related way, Marie's four university exchange peers also provided an important level of support during her re-entry. Described by Marie as *really good friends* with whom she could *share special little moments*, her exchange peers fulfilled a function similar to her family: *it would be different if I didn't have the support of the other girls who went as well*. Unlike many other participants in this study, Marie experienced complete and consistent support

from her relationships. Previous re-entry studies (Lank, 1985; Martin, 1986; Wilson, 1985) have equated such strong and consistent support with ease of re-entry adjustment, and inversely, lack of such support with re-entry difficulties (Adler, 1981; Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Butcher, 2002, Clague & Krupp; 1979; Howard, 1974; Raschio, 1987; Tung, 1988). For Marie, then, the situational characteristics of her re-entry were as equally significant as her individual, personality characteristics in contributing to ease of adjustment.

Conclusion

The first six months of Marie's re-entry experience were predominantly positive, a combined result of having realistic expectations about coming home, strong familial and friendship support, confidence and happiness in her new-found personality changes, and confidence and determination in making and maintaining appropriate friendships, something only possible because of her enlightened perspective on old behaviour.

Marie's re-entry was essentially a period of reappraisal – of herself, of others and of institutions. The ultimate outcome of this multi-faceted process of reappraisal was a *happy, confident* returnee, determined to *spend all [her] money on travel* in the future.

Irresolution

Kate

Once the habit of moving gets into your blood, you always itch for the next challenge. (Anonymous, Werkman, 1980, p. 10).

Introduction

She is everything her introductory email promised – eager, bright, vivacious and energetic. Words tumble from her mouth like a waterfall; I fleetingly wonder how I will ever transcribe this recording. I am eager to know what is behind this torrent of introductory chatter, the tall, slim, elegant frame, the wide, inviting smile, the large, warm, inquisitive blue eyes and the wavy blonde hair fettered by a brown beret. I feel an instant attraction to this young woman. She is my first participant – the first to respond to my request for involvement in the study and my first interviewee. I feel a great sense of anticipation. I can't help but wonder what she is feeling. She leans forward across the large table in the meeting room, catching the wave of cool air rushing out from the portable air conditioner. She is still smiling.

Kate is a 24 year old, final year Law student. She is no stranger to travel. She has holidayed on a number of occasions in the Pacific, worked and travelled as a 19 year old in England and Wales during her 'gap year' prior to university, and recently returned from a semester's study in Ottawa, Canada, a cultural experience book-ended by a month in Europe and three weeks in South America. She has no intention of curbing her peripatetic lifestyle: *I'm planning to go away again next year as well. I want to teach overseas or something in Asia.*

Kate is restless.

The eldest of two daughters, she describes her parents' insights into the direction her life seems to be taking: *I think they understand what I am like and that I'm not going to have a traditional career path. Mum said the other day, "I think you're going to have an interesting life, Katie." I hope so. I always felt bad that I didn't really want to have a job, just travel more. Then I met Alison in Canada; she's 27 and she's really smart and everything and she travels and still doesn't have a proper job – she's into social justice and human rights. So yeah, I don't want to be a proper lawyer either. Some of my friends are settling down and stuff. I don't want to be doing that yet.*

My friends say that they don't know anyone quite like me. I don't know what that means; I think they mean it in a good way. In the past I've done lots of stupid stuff and I often seem to be thinking and interpreting things in a totally different way to everyone else. I think now I'm more accepting of the fact that I'm a bit different and don't try to hide it. I don't want to be boring and be the same as everyone else and have the same opinions. I'm happy where I've got with my life so far and maybe I have a different path to other people, but that is not a bad thing.

Being in Canada

Kate makes the most of her time in Canada. She meets new friends, explores within and beyond her exchange site, and is successful in her studies. Her weekend and holiday travels take her to Calgary, Montreal, Quebec City and Fredericton in New Brunswick. It is *a really, really positive experience*.

Exploring

Kate was restless.

I was getting a bit sick of uni and I wanted something different and I didn't think I could take another year off, so I thought, "Right, well, I'm gonna' do this", and I moved back into home so I could save some money and just started talking to other students who'd been on exchanges and checking out whether I could get a scholarship.

Being proactive, self-motivated and goal-oriented emerges consistently as a theme in my interviews with Kate.

When I say I want to do something, my friends are not surprised. I didn't really care where I went for my exchange, but we'd studied this subject last year called Regional Policy Development and we had to compare Tasmania's economy with somewhere in Atlantic Canada. It was really interesting; I learnt a lot. But also, Ottawa is pretty much one of the main places our law students go for exchange 'cause it's got a really good law school and I knew other people who'd done it and I'd heard they'd had happy experiences, so I thought, "I'll just go there!"

Kate is surprised by the unexpected physical beauty of Ottawa.

Ottawa is a very pretty place. It's the capital, so it's got lots of embassies and flags and stuff. And there's a massive green park near Government House which has all pretty grounds and stuff, squirrels everywhere and a cricket pitch. And there are lots of wild flowers. I didn't expect it to be so pretty. Parliament House actually looks like a fairytale castle. It's on a lake – on a river, I think. And there's a canal. Much prettier than I thought it would be, actually. I didn't expect that because everyone was saying, "It's like Canberra, you know. It's the capital, it's boring." But it's not at all. There are lots of pubs and markets and stuff and it doesn't have a big city feel at all. It's really pretty.

The word 'pretty' is repeated seven times in the next hour. Yet, not all things in Ottawa are 'pretty'.

I didn't expect to see people begging and stuff, in the street, but it happens everywhere. I mean, I know it happens, but I didn't expect to see homeless people right in the university in the hostels. Sometimes you'd think you were just in this normal small place, but there were a few murders and stabbings while I was there and it was like, "Oh, I am in a kind of bigger place." But I didn't feel unsafe at all. I tended to walk around heaps by myself, sometimes at night. I don't know, maybe I was a bit naive about that.

Kate shifts in her chair so that she is now hugging her right knee, then uncoils and sits on her left leg, a kinaesthetic dance that becomes a repetitive refrain. I get the impression that Kate never sits still. Literally and metaphorically.

I remember it was super hot when I first arrived. One day in the first week I went exploring with my friend. We just set off and walked. We were just sort of orienting ourselves so we looked around because I had no idea where I was. I'm hopeless with directions. After I'd been living there a while, I realised I'd been going to this supermarket the wrong way. At the time I remember thinking how big the place was, but it's actually not that big.

Anyway, we went down one street where the Prime Minister lives, and it was actually really weird; you could just go up to it and look in. They're not at all security-conscious. It was a really beautiful day, sunny, and we had a nice time walking around.

Kate tells me that this is a special memory because it represents the beginning of her Canadian experience and, more importantly, the beginning of a special friendship.

Breaking and making the rules

Kate revels in the freedom and excitement that comes with exploring new places and new friendships, and of testing boundaries, both literal and metaphoric.

I became really good friends with Alison in Canada, this mature-aged lady I'd seen around uni at home, but hadn't really known. It must have been in the first couple of weeks because it still really hot, me and Alison and these two other guys I'm still friends with – Pedro from Spain and Rudi from Germany – all went to Jensen Park which is this huge park in Quebec just over the border from Ottawa. We went hiking there and it was a super hot day. We found this great lake called "Blue Lake" and there was this big sign saying, "No swimming. \$100 fine." Now, the first thing you've got to understand about Canadians – maybe it's just Ottawa because it's the capital – is that they're quite anal. They have signs everywhere and everyone obeys the rules. Anyway, we hear this splash and Alison's jumped in the water with her clothes on and that's all it took to encourage me! So, here we were, these two crazy Australian girls in the water. Pedro and Rudi yelled, "Oh my God! Oh my God! What are you girls doing?" Then these tourists came and this guy starts telling us off, reminding us there's a 100 dollar fine. We said, "We don't care!" Alison doesn't give a shit about that sort of thing. And then, this park ranger guy came and he told us off. Apparently, they're trying to regenerate the lake, so we kind of felt bad 'cause we don't like doing things that are bad for the environment. We thought they were just worried about people hurting themselves. I didn't really know Alison very well at that stage, but it helped us to be friends because we'd both done 'naughty' things. It's funny how it happens sometimes – how you just 'click' with someone. She's actually one of my best friends now. We should have met ages ago.

Kate has found in Alison, a kindred spirit.

Alison gave me this hat.

Kate pulls the brown beret from her head and turns it around in her hands as if discovering it for the first time.

She got it in Canada. We both really got into hats while we were in Canada; I never used to be a hat person. I guess it represents a linkage between the two places. And people always comment on how nice it is, and I go, "Yes, I got it in Canada."

Kate's friendship group continues to expand. A joint love of outdoor pursuits binds these free spirits, giving credence to Byrne's (1969) similarity-attraction hypothesis.

Alison and I became good friends with this Canadian guy called Josh. He was about the same age as me and studying Psychology. We met him at a party – Canadians are really big drinkers and they like parties. He was really friendly, probably because he'd done an exchange himself, to Marseilles, in France. He found out that we love bike riding and stuff, and he's a really outdoorsy sort of person too, so we ended up hanging out with him a lot. There was this campus pub we used to go to with him and some other French friends. I remember in winter there'd be this perfect layer of snow on the ground when you'd come out and it would be just a five minute walk back to the res. Sometimes we'd be a bit drunk and we'd be running around, falling in the powdery snow. Once I breathed some of the powdery snow in and almost choked! I couldn't stop laughing.

Kate comes to understand that even humour is culturally defined.

Josh actually found our sense of humour hard to get used to. Alison and I would say things to each other like, "You're such a loser," and Josh would think we were being quite mean to each other, but we didn't care. Australians don't mind looking like dickheads. Like, Alison and I would wear our flip flops across to the cafeteria all the time; we couldn't be bothered putting boots on. People would think we were losers. I think they could appreciate our humour, on a certain level, but they'd never join in. They're much more reserved and conservative than Australians.

Josh lived right near the university, but we'd sometimes go to his cottage – everyone has 'cottages' in Canada, not 'shacks'. His cottage is on a lake right near the American border. I remember we went there in December; there was so much snow. I had seen snow before, but not like that. We have this great photo of Alison, Josh and me all lying on the snow on the border – our heads were in Canada and our bodies in the USA. It was such a contrast to how hot it was when we first arrived, but it was only a couple of months later. It's funny, I was only in Canada for four months but I had really hot, then fall, then the snow. So, I kinda' got a bit of everything really.

Like three other participants in this study – Rebecca, Marie and Joseph – Kate lives in an international residence – or 'res' as she calls it. She, too, experiences both the advantages and disadvantages of this type of communal living.

I stayed in the International Residence – where all the exchange students stayed – which was cool. It was pretty old, but I met heaps of people. I did find it hard not having my own space

and living in a small room; I'd never lived in a college before. And I hated cooking at the res., because I hate cooking anyway, and the facilities were really dodgy. It was a communal kitchen and you had to get your own utensils. I just wasn't inspired to cook there. It was also hard to get nice food, which surprised me, so I ended up eating really bad food a lot of the time. The supermarket meat was really yucky and the vegetables were abnormally green. I just wanted fresh, healthy food, not something that had been battered. And Canada's a bit like the USA – there are big servings and the people are overweight. I think they secretly add sugar to everything! And the uni was sponsored by Coke; they would only have Coca Cola products. They also had tobacco advertising. I hadn't realised the amount of corporate branding at the university.

So, because of that, Alison and I used to go to Josh's house all the time and ask him to cook for us because he liked cooking. I've got strong memories of just going over to his house and hanging out and drinking and doing that sort of thing. I miss him. We still keep in email contact, but he was more friends with Alison; he was Alison's friend first.

In Canada, Kate enjoys some kudos – a direct result of her being an Australian.

I did some volunteer work at International House – organising things like cultural days or day trips. A lot of them were ESL students, and they hadn't had anyone from Australia there, so they were, like, "Oh, an Australian girl!" I was a bit of a novelty. It happened a lot actually: just being Australian, and realizing you're different, and people thinking you're hilarious because you have a funny accent. The Canadians really love Australians and the guys love Australian girls as well. It was good because here you're a nobody, but over there the guys paid more attention because you had an accent. I'd forgotten what that was like: I got it all the time in the UK.

I never really felt homesick at all. I think because it went so fast – it was only five months. I got used to the place pretty quickly – it's not that much different to Australia. I could have stayed longer. And compared to being away last time...

Kate proceeds to share details of her earlier overseas 'gap year' experience in England and Wales – a not so happy time.

I was only 19. I got pretty homesick by the third month. It was the first time I'd been away by myself, and I didn't know anyone there. I had to work, and I moved between a few different places and that's pretty tough. I didn't have the best time; I wasn't that happy. It wasn't what

*I'd expected. **This** time, I wanted to make sure **I** wasn't the reason if things didn't work out well. I wanted to prove it to myself – that I could do it. I was worried when I first went over there: "What if I don't enjoy it?" This exchange wasn't as emotional, I guess – this experience was almost like an antidote for the last one. It was a great experience and that was really good for me.*

It seems that Kate's fun-loving approach to life in Canada was part of her 'insurance' for making this overseas experience better than the last one.

Academe

It's over half way through the first interview and Kate hasn't yet mentioned her academic life. This is becoming a familiar pattern in this study. Like James – another participant in this study – Kate prioritised her social experiences while on exchange.

Law is post-grad over there, and they're very serious about it. It's a lot more competitive than here and it's quite expensive. You have to sit this 'Law School Admission Test' to get in and apparently it's really stressful. So, I thought, "Oh God, I'm really lucky to be here as an exchange student because I don't think I would have got here otherwise." Most people in my class were 28, 30 or older. I was there more to have fun than, I mean, I still did alright, but my priority was, you know, to have the most experience and not get really good grades. They were all there arriving to class with their laptops. I didn't even have a laptop. I would just sometimes take notes or I'd be late. They probably thought I was very unreliable. I found it harder, although I actually got the same kind of results I probably would have got here. So, I'm kind of surprised actually.

Kate laughs, looking away, seemingly embarrassed. I ask her why she's surprised.

Oh, I don't know. I always felt like the stupidest person in the class, not because it was different law – it was similar to what I would be doing here – but the amount of pages was harder and the discussion was a lot higher level, I think. And often I felt like I didn't have anything to say.

She re-establishes eye contact and continues animatedly, her embarrassment quickly replaced with pride.

But I did a feminist law class and that was really great; it was probably the best class. The subjects there were more interesting than here. The Law School there has a social justice focus so they've got a greater range of things - more alternative subjects. And here most of the lecturers are academics. Over there, most were practising professionals, which is why they had lots of late lectures, usually 7-10 p.m. But it was really good because a lot of them had worked on human rights cases and I could ask them questions; I enjoyed that.

Kate studies five subjects, including Spanish. She notices a distinct difference in university expectations. In Canada, the lectures last longer and they are *more discursive*; student *opinion* is sought and valued. At home, Kate feels that lecturers sometimes *spoon-feed* students, there being no direct repercussions if readings aren't completed before class. Administratively, however, she prefers her home university.

It was really painful and the library wasn't as advanced as us. Computers were a lot older. It was a bit annoying – everyone would be like 'having a Canada day', you know, where administrative things take forever. It was a really crap system actually. Everything was centralised, like, "I need a photocopy in colour". "Sorry, you need to go over there!" Librarians were not very helpful; here they're pretty good. And lecturers know you here. I kinda realised that we have a good uni here; they get to know their students. I did enjoy Law School, but I think it wasn't quite what I'd expected.

I was sad to leave. I was really jealous that a lot of the other exchange students got to stay on for another semester. There were so many people I wanted to say goodbye to, some I knew I would keep in touch with, and some I knew I wouldn't. It was hard. I got used to Canada pretty fast. It was kind of weird, you get involved with things and then you just get plucked out, you just leave. I went travelling then I came home. It went so fast. It feels strange.

Being home

Kate has *done re-entry* before; coming home isn't a new experience. While not seriously challenging this time, her re-entry still involves renegotiating relationships with parents, sibling, friends and university peers as well as adjusting to loss and change – loss of daily contact with her Canadian friends and lifestyle and change in home life and university context.

Renegotiating space and place

Kate has had to move back home. She cannot afford to live independently. This is the third time she has moved back home since first leaving at 18 years of age. Although she is made feel welcome, and there are few real problems, she describes the experience initially as *a bad thing*. At 24 years of age, living at home presents a number of challenges. She particularly notices her loss of freedom and unresolved anxiety about her sister.

After four months

I guess that happens any time when you are back in your parents' home – you lose a bit of your freedom. I haven't got any money, so...Mum said the other day, "I know it's hard for you living at home with us," but really it hasn't been too bad. Other times when I've moved home we've fought a lot, but not this time. I think my sister has found it hard, though – how I've just slotted back in. She suffers from depression; she's had it for a long time. She's a couple of years younger than me. She really hates having her routine changed, so it was hard for her when I went away, and she really missed me, but it was also hard for her to adjust when I came home. I think I am so noisy as well. She went into a bit of a decline when I came home. I think she'd been ok before that, so I thought it was my fault, but maybe it wasn't. She was just having trouble adjusting. Like, she is quite difficult sometimes – that is just part of who she is. We're quite close. It was hard coming back because I felt guilty that she was upset. She has always wanted to travel and hasn't been able to. I felt bad that I'd had this experience – she actually wanted to go to Canada herself at some stage and hadn't been able to do it.

The situation has eased somewhat with the passing of time.

But, I don't feel as guilty now as I did when I first came home. I do feel generally guilty, you know, that she has depression and I don't. She's had it for a long time, so I do understand these things, but I still get a bit upset.

Kate's emotion around her sister is clearly visible, yet, in a style that I've come to recognise as characteristic of her, she moves on to a new topic quickly, choosing not to dwell too long on challenging issues.

Reconnecting with friends also presents challenges. Kate reflects on an incident one week after her return – an incident remarkably similar to one experienced by Lynette. Lack of interest – on the part of friends – in a sojourner's experience is not peculiar to Kate and Lynette; it is something long documented in the literature (see, for example, Austin, 1983b;

Bossard & Peterson, 2006; Osland, 1995). Whether motivated by jealousy, threat or inability to relate (see, for example, Brislin & van Buren, 1974; Storti, 2001; Wilson, 1993c), Kate experiences her friend's response as hurtful. Her explanation for, and response to, being 'ignored' by a friend, reflects her self-analytical behaviour. Noteworthy is the fact that Kate is able to do what the literature suggests many returnees are not – recognise that "home cultures continue to evolve" in their absence (Osland, 1995, p. 172).

I went out for coffee with some friends when I first got back, including one I didn't really know that well. She knew I'd been away, but she didn't ask me anything about the exchange. I shouldn't feel that just because I've been away that everyone is going to be interested in me when I come home, but at the time I was a bit upset. I normally don't get upset about that sort of thing – I'm pretty easy-going. I remember thinking to myself, "I wonder why that upset me?" I realised that I was thinking just about myself, and that not everything has to be about me. I guess the world doesn't revolve around me. I mean, most people have been interested in asking about my experience; my close friends all kept in contact while I was away, but this girl didn't. I rationalised it by thinking that she's the type of person who talks about herself anyway. But I had only been back a week. I was upset, but shouldn't really have been because everyone else has their own things they've been doing in the time I've been away. Then I got annoyed at myself at being upset. I'm like that; I'll often ask myself, "Now, why did I feel like that?"

Kate's style of self-analysis is reminiscent of Marie's. If, as Sasagawa et al. (2006) suggest, internal locus of control is a predictor of re-entry success, then such self-analysis (as characteristic of an internal locus of control approach) would seem to assist in managing re-entry challenges. Certainly it helped Kate make meaning from her experience.

Kate's renegotiation of space and place is not only relational, it is also individual: her renegotiation extends to her own identity. She talks about how she's changed as a result of the exchange.

We had to do this moot thing, which is like a mock. You're given the case and you have to address the court. But it's not really court, though; it's just one of your lecturers or a solicitor. It's actually really scary and very stressful. You have to gather all the facts and get all the law related to the case; it's a lot of hard work and you only have a week. I did mine last week and it was a bit of a stuff-up. The guy didn't give us the question and wasn't very helpful. He turned out to be a pretty important public official. I didn't know who he was and we had a bit of a confrontation – he'd only written the question on the day! By the time we

got to do our moot I was actually quite aggressive. I just didn't care. I'm definitely more confident now and I will stand up for myself. I was probably like that anyway, but now I'm more so. I don't care. I don't care who you are. I wasn't rude, but I think that if I am pissed off I will say something. I am a lot more confident now and will stand up for myself.

I ask her if she thinks she was a different person in Canada to the one she is at home.

No, I don't think so. But I think I became more comfortable with myself. You have certain friends who, when you're around, you tend to be more yourself; Alison is one of those people. I have a couple of other friends like that, too.

Kate reflects on her relationship with Alison.

My relationship with Alison has been pretty much the same since we got home, although I don't see as much of her now because she is pretty busy. You know, you have some friends because you shared the same experience. But if that is the only thing you have in common, I think that is when friendships don't tend to last. Alison and I have Canada as a shared experience, but we also have uni and life here, too. So, we don't just have the Canada experience to build on. We have more things in common than that and it is more likely that that we will have a strong friendship.

Kate misses her friends in Canada. She finds the temporal and spatial disconnect between her life in Canada and her life at home quite confusing.

I got this email the other day. It made feel quite homesick, no, not homesick, 'nostalgic' is probably a better word. A lot of the friends I made there stayed for a full year, so they're just getting ready to return home now. I know how they'll be feeling and they're doing all this fun stuff – stuff that I used to do. It doesn't seem real. Everything is so different to here. I felt really jealous. You know exactly what they're doing because it is the same thing that you used to do, and I'm over here, and it makes it seem like it didn't happen. I mean, I know it happened; it's hard to explain – it's going on at the same time and you want to be there. You just wish you were there to be part of that experience. It does seem like a long time ago.

Kate goes on to explain the games she plays in her head with time.

Often I'll be lying in bed – I was doing this last night – and I'll try to work out how long it's been since I've been back, and I work out that I haven't been back for as long as I was away

yet. This is what happened last time I went away as well. When I think about the fact that that was only five years ago and that seems like a long time and five years is nothing. It's a strange feeling, and I don't know how to explain it. It just seems a lot longer than it actually was.

Kate purses her lips and shrugs in resignation. Her sudden and deliberate closure of this discussion illustrates the frustration she feels over her inability to explain clearly what she thinks and feels.

After six months

After six months home, Kate has a somewhat more distanced, objective perspective on both her exchange and her re-entry experience. Some of her angst seems to have dissipated and her confidence has increased with the realisation of how her knowledge of the world has grown.

I applied for a job at the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and was sent the criteria and had to answer one about international politics and I ended up talking about the Quebec separatist thing. I wouldn't have known about this a year ago. Definitely, when you live somewhere else you get a different idea of politics and you realise you can't just generalise about cultures.

She also has a more pragmatic perspective on her attempts to renegotiate friendships.

I'm not upset about that now. For a while, at the beginning, I was wary of talking too much about the exchange because you can really alienate people. But now, I just choose people to talk to who think it might be interesting; I won't just 'bring it up'. Actually, I met someone the other night who is a Canadian girl and I crapped on to her for a while about it. I guess people who haven't been on an exchange don't realise how different it can be and what an experience it can be so therefore they can say, "How was it?" and just expect a one word answer! If you talk to someone who has done an exchange you have more specific questions. Like, I know a person at uni who is going to Germany soon and I was really excited, so we had a really big chat about stuff. I always get excited when people are interested in something I've done. From my point of view, it's "Why wouldn't anyone want to know that stuff?" From another person's point of view, it's probably, "Ok, well, she went overseas – right." When you talk to people who have travelled a bit you can have more of a conversation than with people who haven't. I guess this is because you have something in common.

Seeking out others with shared experiences – that is, those who've travelled – is characteristic of returnees' behaviour (Butcher, 2002; Lank, 1985; Wilson, 1993c). It is, as Kate suggests, the validation of the experience, particularly through questioning, that is important for sojourners (Martin, 1986; Storti, 2001).

I ask how important it is to her that others know she's been on an exchange.

I think it is important. I can't think why. It could be selfish, because I like talking about it! It's probably an ego thing. I think it's important because it is something that I really enjoyed and made me happy and it's a good way of remembering it. I actually think it is one of the best things that I have done. And also, I had to save before I went away, and I adjusted pretty well, so in a way it was an achievement. Generally, the response you get from telling people you have been on an exchange is very positive and that's nice. It's kind of like a reinforcing thing. That's why I was so keen to do these interviews. Just chatting with you has prolonged that sense of nostalgia. I've had a captive audience.

Kate's response to my question indicates a confluence of both her 'private' self and 'collective' self (Triandis, 1989) during her re-entry. Cognitions related to her own behaviour, as well as cognitions related to others' perceptions of her behaviour, are equally important in her framing of the experience.

The lessening of some of Kate's angst as her re-entry unfolds is reflected in her burgeoning realisation that connection to a place is through *people*.

I was thinking about that parallel kind of thing we were talking about last time – them there and me here – I feel ok about that now. I think I was a bit stressed last time and I was thinking about how exciting it would be to be somewhere different. I think most of my friends have left Ottawa now, so that feeling has passed because I know they've finished up. It's weird, isn't it? People are still there in Ottawa, doing stuff, but it's like the experience I had in common with them has finished, so I'm not feeling so left out now. It's strange. Those five months in Canada went really fast. It always goes faster when you're doing fun stuff, as opposed to being at uni, although this year has gone really fast.

I ask her whether she ever has the sensation of wondering whether the exchange ever happened.

*Yes, for sure. It just seems like such a long time ago. But, in the context of my life, it was a very short piece of time. It seems like I get more reminders of my gap year than the exchange. I don't know why. Probably because I was there for a longer time. The exchange was a bit more isolated, if that makes sense. Most of my friends had a gap year off, but going on exchange wasn't common. You can be so far removed. Unless I **thought** about it myself, I wouldn't see anything around that reminded me of being away and it could be nasty. Actually, I'm having my photos developed today. That will be cool because I've been really flat. I remember telling you last time that I couldn't be bothered getting them developed. I'm not really a photo person.*

I share with Kate my own re-entry story of plastering my fridge with photos of my sojourn. She laughs, knowingly. I am interested in her description of herself as being *really flat*. While genuinely clearly less stressed about some issues after six months home, she seems unexcited and unmotivated about life in her home culture.

She is still restless.

Staying motivated

Kate finds maintaining motivation, particularly in regard to university studies and her future career, a challenge. It reaches a critical point after the fourth month home. Her restless spirit needs a new goal.

After two months

On her second day home, Kate begins a summer school unit. She sees this as advantageous in her initial re-adjustment: *I like being busy. I get bored if I don't have anything to do.*

When I came back I was pretty busy straight away, so I didn't really have time to sit around and think. I think I've adjusted pretty well to being home. For me, it was probably easier because I was in a country that spoke English and it wasn't that culturally different, and because I'd been away before and I knew not to expect everything to be the same.

Kate's rationalisation has a text book feel to it: 'cultural distance' and 'expectations' are widely explored in the re-entry literature (see, for example, Cannon, 2000; Martin & Harrell, 2004). Yet, two months later she reveals a more complex emotional picture.

After four months

Kate's description of her changing emotional states during her first few months home reflects the W-curve re-entry adjustment pattern first posited by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) – initial excitement followed by periods of frustration and anomie.

At the moment it is a bit stressful for me because I am just feeling a bit unmotivated. I don't know if it's related to being back. When I first got back I wasn't feeling like that. I was saying to one of my friends last night, last year was kind of exciting because I knew I was going away, and then I was away, and that was fine, but this year, I just kind of know this is the end. It's a bit hard to be motivated at uni, and I'm not really caring too much, which is bad. Normally, I'd start to kick in a lot earlier to prepare for exams and stuff. Not that I was that studious in Canada, but I did ok with the work. The subjects there were really good, actually. I did this really good feminist subject and I've been trying to use some of that perspective in my studies here. I'm going to see one of my professors about it today. I'm also going to try and get my friends to do more of this sort of stuff. The subjects in Canada were all electives which meant they were really interesting. Now, because I'm in my fifth year, I'm doing quite hard subjects and I am just hating it. Well, not hating it – well, two of my subjects I am. So, I guess one of my challenges is trying to be motivated and keep up with my studies.

I have to work out something fun to do for next year. I tend to have lots of goals and stuff. I like to have a plan in place; I like to have some structure. I couldn't just take off to places and not plan, like Alison does. When I decide to do something I tend to work towards it, so I put all these things in place. Last night Alison I were talking about next year, just jobs and stuff. You can apply for jobs, but it is kind of out of your hands and I'm not used to things being like that. I like having some control over what I do, and at the moment I'm finding that hard to do. It is just really difficult. I have applied for a few jobs, even though I probably won't get them. I feel I should at least try and apply for something. I don't care if I get them or not; I just want to be doing something about it. I don't know what's going to happen. I want to live in another country again. My dad said, "Why are you applying for jobs? I thought you wanted to travel next year." But it is just the thing to do. Explore your options.

Kate's apparent intolerance of ambiguity (Frenkel-Brunswik, 1949) seems somewhat incongruent with the literature. Although minimally researched, increased tolerance of ambiguity is a reported outcome of re-entry (Adler, 1981). Kate clearly finds the lack of certainty around her future quite destabilising.

After six months

Kate appears more settled by her sixth month home, something she attributes to her renewed focus on study.

I was a bit stressed last time and I was thinking how exciting it would be to be somewhere different. But I feel ok about that now. I feel a bit more relaxed now. I feel alright at the moment because I'm doing a lot of study...well, not a lot of study, but more reading and stuff.

Feeling like she is exercising some control over events in her life seems to have moderated her restlessness – temporarily, at least. Yet, there is no clear indication that she has progressed to the top of Gullahorn's and Gullahorns' (1963) W-curve – complete re-integration in her home culture.

Doing more and doing less

Kate describes herself as a *quite sociable*. But she has found balancing the demands of uni life with her desire to increase her social life a difficult task.

After two months

I'm a pretty social person anyway, but since I've been back I've definitely made more of an effort to meet different people. I've been thinking, you know, that I could miss out on really good people if I don't make an effort. I kind of miss hanging out with people from other countries and learning about different cultures. They're so different and so much fun. Now, when I hear people at uni with different accents, I'll ask them where they're from. But there aren't very many, to be honest. I was thinking, I'd like to get involved in stuff here, like I got involved in International House in Canada, but I don't think they have anything similar here.

After four months

I have made more friends this year which has been nice. I don't know whether that's related to the exchange. But I'm a lot more open to meeting different kinds of people and I'm realising that people will be receptive to you making an effort and won't interpret it as you coming across as too full on. Like, I met this guy in Summer School – I didn't like him at first. We had to do group work and he was a bit slack, but we ended up becoming quite good friends. I was having some friends around for an Easter thing and I thought I should invite him – he's from Melbourne – he ended up coming around a few other times because my family can be funny at times and he gets along with them. He plays Monopoly with us sometimes. He's a bit of a character. It's good to make an effort because people quite like it.

And I'm happy being the one to make the effort first instead of expecting other people to do it. But I don't do it because I'm just trying to help someone; I generally enjoy their company. It is really interesting.

I tend to seek out people who've got a story to tell or people who are 'a bit out there'. There are really interesting people out there and sometimes you might miss meeting them if you are just too busy.

Despite Kate's genuine desire to be more involved with the international community, this still hasn't happened by the fourth month home.

One thing I wanted to do was get more involved in the international thing here but I haven't done that because I haven't had time. And another thing I wanted to do, but unfortunately, I haven't had time again, was at TAFE they have this thing where you can teach people – migrants – English and help them with their skills, but it was on at the same time as my moot and I don't know if I can do it now. I also wanted to help people with their English at the Migrant Resource Centre because even if I could teach English overseas that would be a good experience for me as well. Even if it was just one afternoon a week, it would be good to do something like that.

It hasn't escaped my attention that less than a minute ago Kate was reflecting on the disadvantages of being *too busy*. I ask her why she wants to do this type of work.

Well, I've done a bit of volunteer work in the past, and I haven't done anything like that for a while, and because I really enjoyed meeting international people while I was away and a lot of them are really funny, and it would be something that would be good to do, I guess. I love meeting different people.

Even though she said in the first interview that she was making more of an effort to meet people and go out, this seems more an ideal than a reality.

I haven't probably because I have been quite busy. I have been a bit sick as well. It will be good when the end of the semester happens. I've been whingeing about how cold it is in Tasmania, but Canada was really, really cold.

There is a clear paradox in Kate's current situation. She articulates that she wants to, and is very genuine in her desire to, meet new and different people – in many ways, replicating the

situation in Canada – yet she seems unable to see that through to fruition. She sets out to do more, but ends up doing less. I wonder whether this is related specifically to context, or to her changed emotional and cognitive spaces –perhaps it's both.

I ask her what she misses about being away.

I didn't have to work. I didn't have that much responsibility; at home I had real responsibilities and stuff. I could just do whatever I wanted in Canada. We had a lot of fun. Like, there was always something going on. It was pretty busy and it was more kind of fun stuff, like you were always seeing people; you used to just go out to a hotel and have a meal. It was quite easy. That was one of the good things about being in Ottawa – you could just go away at weekends and stuff as well. Now you've got to arrange to have dinner with someone and it's always more of an effort. I don't know why. I guess our priorities were different. Like, when we were there, we kind of expected that we would do something, whereas here, there is work and...I think over there I made time for more stuff. I did initially start doing that here, but uni is a lot harder now than it was when I was over there. And over there we didn't have jobs. Here, most of my friends aren't at uni anymore and one or two of them have children. It's different – a different lifestyle. Your priorities are different. Back home there is more routine. It's funny, isn't it – you really have to go to another country to do that. Why can't you...? You feel restless. Maybe you feel as though you are holiday. I don't know. But it's not reality, not exactly an escape, but, yeah, it's not real life.

Like Rebecca, Kate rues the loss of freedom and changed lifestyle that comes with changed context.

Final words

I am eager to get away again. Like, I'm not scared of going to another place. I know I don't want to be settling down yet. I think my parents know that I'm pretty capable and that I'll be alright.

Before Kate leaves this final interview, she reminds me that I had earlier, in an email, promised to talk with her about possible contacts for teaching English overseas. I share with her some of my own knowledge, gleaned from experience, and also write down some web addresses that I know advertise overseas English teaching positions regularly. She is grateful, promising to keep in touch should she ever secure one of these jobs. With her new atlas under one arm, bag over the other, and hat once again firmly secured on her head, she bids me

farewell in the same manner in which she first introduced herself – a torrent of excitable chatter.

Making meaning

How prior experience affected the re-entry

Having experienced re-entry before, Kate *knew not to expect everything to be the same* at home. Also, because Canada *wasn't that culturally different*, she believed that adjusting to her home culture was *easier* than it otherwise might have been. Yet, while not different in terms of traditionally identified cultural attributes such as language and religion, Canada was different in terms of lifestyle and it is this that Kate found challenging during her re-entry.

Kate, like James – another participant in this study – was candid in her admission that her exchange was more about *hav[ing] fun* and *hav[ing] the most experience* than *get[ting] really good grades*. While she still performed well in her studies, she did prioritise her social life. This was evidenced by her consistent social engagements with Alison and Josh, in particular – both people who shared similar outdoor pursuits and a love of exploring – at the campus pub, at Josh's house and cottage, in nearby provinces and cities, and local parks, lakes and suburbs. Even though she acknowledged that this wasn't *real life*, the fact that she would lament this loss of *fun stuff* and freedom from *real responsibility* once she returned home, where everything was *more of an effort* and dictated by *routine*, was perhaps predictable. Getting *involved with things*, then getting *plucked out* felt *weird* and *strange* to Kate. Moreover, she felt *left out* and *really jealous* of those exchange students who were staying another semester. These feelings of loss were exacerbated once home as she attempted to readjust to her old way of life. The notion of loss and change emerged as a key theme in her narrative and helps to explain both her *restless[ness]* and her feeling *really flat* once home.

Although not prioritised by Kate, university studies did play a significant role in her overseas experience. She found studying law in Canada, primarily because she was initially unaware of its post-graduate status, *not quite what [she'd] expected*. Yet, it was still a rewarding, if somewhat challenging experience. Kate, self-identified as being on *a different path to other people*, found, in particular, the Canadian law school's focus on alternative subjects with social justice, human rights and feminist perspectives *really great* and *more interesting* than law school at home. Her attempt to replicate some of the Canadian law school perspectives in her home studies evidenced her genuine *enjoy[ment]* of the Canadian experience. This

contrasting university experience in Canada, in many ways, paved the way for her *just hating* much about her home university experience and feeling *stressed* and *unmotivated*. Her experience of her final year at law school at home, then, can only be fully understood in light of her Canadian law school experience.

A less tangible, but nonetheless significant, aspect of Kate's overseas experience that related directly to her re-entry experience, was her pride. She was clearly determined to make this overseas experience more successful than her gap year experience; she wanted this experience to be an *antidote* for her last one. It could be suggested that this psychological framing of the experience, from the very beginning, drove her pursuit of enjoyment over studies in Canada. Also, despite the *higher level of discussion* and *amount of pages* that was required in the Canadian law school, she performed better than she expected. This *surprised*, but discernibly pleased Kate. These two conditions – her determination to enjoy her exchange and her relative success in academic studies – helped to explain her desire, once home, for others to know that she'd been on an exchange. It was, according to Kate, *an ego thing*, a way of *reinforcing* an experience that she'd had to *save* for and *adjust* to. It was *an achievement*. Yet, her prior experience of re-entry had equipped her with knowledge of the dangers of *talking too much about the exchange*. She had no desire to *alienate people*. Rather, she sought the company of others who had travelled – like-minded and like-experienced people – with whom *you can have more of a conversation*. Kate's re-entry friendship patterns, then, were palpably influenced by her overseas experience. This is something well documented in the re-entry literature (see, for example, Butcher, 2002; Lank, 1985).

In a related vein, Kate did experience – positively – the distinction that characteristically accompanies 'difference'. She enjoyed the kudos that went with the *novelty* of being an Australian and all its attendant benefits such as *guys paying you more attention*. This was clearly a preferable situation to the one at home for Kate: *here you're a nobody*. In Canada Kate reaped the psychological and social benefits of being 'a big fish in a little sea', something that typically occurs during overseas sojourns (Austin, 1983a; Osland, 1995; Storti, 2001). The corollary, of course, as was certainly the case for Kate, is that upon re-entry, people are characteristically repositioned as 'little fish in a big sea', something that most returnees find challenging, and something that inevitably results in a re-negotiation of identity (Austin, 1983a; Osland, 1995; Storti, 2001). For Kate, then, her re-entry was characterised by some loss of social status. When considered in light of her loss of academic status through moving from post-graduate coursework in Canada back to undergraduate coursework in Tasmania, and her loss of *fun* lifestyle, it is perhaps not surprising that by the sixth month home, she was describing herself as feeling *really flat*.

Themes emerging from the narrative

Relationships

The significance, impact and maintenance of relationships emerged as a key theme in Kate's narrative; much of her re-entry sharing focussed on relationships. These relationships, both real and unrealised, were with family, friends (both in Canada and at home), university colleagues and members of the local international and migrant community.

Kate's re-entry relationship with her family was determined, to a certain extent, by her financial need to live at home when she returned from overseas. Her parents, like many parents in the re-entry literature (see, for example, Martin, 1986; Wilson, 1993c), respected their daughter's capacity to live independently, while acknowledging the difficulties that moving back home created: *[we] know it's hard for you living at home with us*. While Kate clearly rued the loss of *freedom* that family life entailed, it was to a fundamentally supportive family situation that she returned. The one aspect of family life, however, that was challenging for Kate was her relationship with her only sibling, her sister.

Kate's relationship with her sister was directly influenced by both her leaving and her returning. Unable to cope well with change, her sister's mental health declined when Kate moved overseas and again when she returned home. For Kate, this manifested itself in her feeling *guilty, upset* and *bad*, both for having had an experience that was beyond the reach of her sister, and for upsetting her routine and equilibrium both when she left, and when she moved back into the family home. Although she claimed that her sense of guilt diminished somewhat with the passing of time, the situation with her sibling illustrates the inherent psychological tension in balancing positive and negative outcomes of an experience. Like Rebecca, whose father's behaviour potentially 'repainted' a positive experience as a negative one, Kate had to balance her rational and emotional responses to her sister's behaviour in order to maintain her appreciation of her overseas experience as something *really, really positive*: *I do understand these things, but I do get a bit upset*. What perhaps made it somewhat easier for Kate was the fact that her sister's behaviour was not intentional; Kate positioned it as being *just part of who [her sister] is*. She did not experience her sister's behaviour as a deliberate attempt to sabotage her overseas and re-entry experience, as Rebecca did with her father.

The impact of re-entry on siblings is minimally investigated in the literature. The situation with Kate's sister appears to be congruent with Storti's (2001) assertion that siblings may feel threatened by the return of their brother or sister from overseas, having been, during their absence, the centre of their parents' attention and having had unlimited access to previously

shared resources. It does not appear congruent with Martin's (1986) finding that relationships with siblings improve during re-entry. This finding from Kate's narrative further emphasises the critical role of relationships during re-entry and their inherent capacity to influence the returnees' adjustment – both temporally and qualitatively. In Kate's case, it wasn't just Kate that was re-adjusting, it was her sister as well; it was a symbiotic process, each impacting on the other.

Friendships were a valuable commodity for Kate, both in Canada and at home. They defined her overseas experience and, subsequently, affective, behavioural and cognitive aspects of her re-entry. That friendships defined her overseas experience was evidenced not only by her descriptions of life in Canada, but more so by her difficulty after four months home, in coming to terms with the fact that some of her friends were still in Canada, *doing the same thing that [she] used to do*. It wasn't until she knew that her friends had *finished up* in Canada, and *the experience [she] had in common with them [had] finished*, some two months later, that those feelings of *nostalgia* and *jealousy* passed. Maintaining regular email contact with her Canadian friends during her first few months home had helped Kate feel less *removed* and reminded her that the experience had been *real*. Kate's emotional link to Canada, so visibly important to her during her first four months home, was through people, not places.

Alison, in particular, was a critical link in Kate's re-entry experience. Having had the same shared experience, and thus providing tangible proof that the exchange did actually *happen*, Alison maintained her friendship with Kate once home, although in a quantifiably and qualitatively different format. In many ways, Kate's hat was a metaphor for this critical link – proof of what was and what still is.

The value that Kate placed on friendships was further evidenced by her desire to *meet different people* once home. She enacted, as well as voiced, this desire, making *more friends* and conversing with international students at uni, and inviting people into her family home. This desire to *ma[ke] more friends* at home could be interpreted as representing more than *just help[ing] someone* or generally *enjoy[ing] their company*; it could also, conceivably, be related to compensating for the loss of diverse friendships in Canada. Her voiced, yet not enacted, desire to work with members of the migrant community was a self-identified attempt to replicate those enjoyable and diverse friendship experiences from Canada. This is one example of how Kate dealt with loss and change, something discussed in more detail later in this chapter.

Friendships also contributed to the development of Kate's identity at home. Upset by, but understanding of, some friends' lack of interest in her overseas experience, Kate sought solace and company from those friends who allowed her to be *more [her]self*: people with whom she had *something in common*. This resulted in Kate feeling *more confident* and *more comfortable with [her]self, accepting of the fact that she was a bit different*. Her *confrontation* with the public official over her moot was evidence of this increasing confidence. Friendships, then, both contributed to and ameliorated feelings of isolation during Kate's re-entry.

Loss and change

Kate experienced loss when she returned home: loss of freedom, fun, friendships, status and purpose. This isn't something peculiar to Kate; loss is a well documented outcome of re-entry (see, for example, Cox, 2004; Werkman, 1980). Such loss is compounded when complemented by the immanent change that typically accompanies re-entry. While such feelings of loss can manifest itself in various states of depressive disorder (see, for example, Sahin, 1990) – amongst other things – Kate's loss, rather, manifested itself in two primary ways – feelings of restlessness and associated lack of motivation, and attempts to replicate associations with people from different cultures.

Feelings of restlessness weren't created by Kate's re-entry; they were exacerbated by it. A self-confessed goal-oriented person, Kate constantly sought purpose and direction in her life: *I like to have a plan in place*. Being home represented *the end* – the loss of immediate opportunities for overseas experiences that are characteristically legitimised while a student, but which become more elusive with the professional status that the completion of an academic degree heralds. These feelings of restlessness manifested themselves in a variety of ways: feeling *really flat*, *stressed* and *unmotivated*. Kate's way of responding to this was to *work out something fun to do for next year*; in essence, *explor[ing] [her] options*. It seems that Kate's way of dealing with the loss that accompanied re-entry was to not deal with it. Rather than focussing on how to re-integrate into her home culture as a way of managing her feelings of loss, she sought to replicate aspects of her life from Canada (studies and friendships, for example) and constantly create new and exciting opportunities that distracted her from her feelings of loss. Kate's desire to work with the migrant community at home was one attempt to replicate those *interesting*, *different* and *fun* times she spent with international students in Canada. It was, in essence, an attempt to compensate for her loss. Yet, despite her best intentions, this ideal wasn't fulfilled; it was hijacked by her being *busy*, something that Kate herself identified as a symptom of stress, a direct outcome of which was lack of motivation and associated lack of organisation with, and management of, studies. The stress

that Kate experienced has long been acknowledged in the cultural adjustment literature as typifying the affective domain of re-entry (see, for example, Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Ward et al., 2001; Westwood et al., 1986). Yet, in contrast to James – another participant in this study – who spent considerable quiet, contemplative space attempting to make sense of his re-entry challenges, Kate's response was to keep moving – to plan for the future, preferably overseas. In this way, it could be suggested that rather than re-entering her home culture, Kate was merely re-visiting. In her mind, and evidenced by her behaviour (such as job applications) she was just temporarily home.

Conclusion

For Kate, re-entry had both favourable and unfavourable consequences – an opportunity to celebrate feelings of achievement over such a *positive* overseas experience, as well as a process of dealing with loss. “Pain and growth” are both characteristic of transitions such as re-entry (Smith, 2002b, p. 304) and while not seriously destabilising, for Kate, these polarised perspectives ultimately manifested themselves in two ways during the first six months of her re-entry, first, by attempting to replicate aspects of her overseas experience metaphorically, by introducing and attempting to maintain some Canadian conditions in her home culture, and second, literally, by planning new overseas experiences for the following year. Kate's re-entry was, then, only ever considered, by her, and her parents, as a temporary condition. She was in a state of constant restlessness; she was irresolute.

Metamorphosis

James

*How shall I talk of the sea to the frog
If he has never left his pond?
How shall I talk of the frost to the bird of the summerland
If he has never left the land of its birth?
How shall I talk of life with the sage
If he is a prisoner of his doctrine?*

(4th Century Chinese poet, Chung Tzu)

Introduction

James is late. Thirty minutes after the scheduled start time for the first interview, he knocks on my office door and pokes his head in, smiling. As he bustles into my office – laptop computer bag slung over one shoulder and folders held at odd angles under the other arm – he apologises for his tardiness (citing computer problems) and breaks into a wide, warm smile. As he introduces himself I notice a definite, cultured British accent.

James is a final year Architecture student with an unbridled passion for buildings. He has recently returned from an 18 month sojourn in Europe, six months of which was spent on exchange at a Scottish university. This was James's first overseas experience, something he describes throughout the three interviews as *utterly extraordinary, amazing, mind blowing, intense and spiritually nourishing*, an experience that *definitely translated to a lot of change in me*. For James, it was an experience that provided more opportunities than he could *ever hope to describe in words*.

The decision to undertake an exchange was a long time in the planning. A visit from a Scottish lecturer in the first year of his degree *planted a seed*. Halfway through his third year of study, he realised that the possibility of completing his fourth year overseas was *very appealing – a great opportunity to see things and open [his] eyes a little*. James had to *basically orchestrate the exchange* himself. In Tasmania, *all the paperwork was sorted; in Scotland, a lot of the paperwork got lost in the system* – something that caused *many problems* for James in situ.

Because of the differing northern hemisphere academic calendar, James was compelled to take a year's leave from his studies. This leave time, book-ending his exchange semester, housed many of his life-changing experiences.

Being in Scotland

James spends the first six weeks living in the Lakes District, after which he moves to Aberdeen – the site of his exchange university – for the next 12 months. Aberdeen is used as a base for exploring much of Europe. Hungry for *cultural bombardment*, he travels – mostly alone – in the three months prior to the beginning of the university semester, and during university study breaks, through Holland, France, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic and Turkey. For the six month period following the exchange he lives and works in Glasgow. Scandinavia is a final destination before returning home.

This is a period of intense personal transformation for James, of growth and self-discovery.

Six degrees of separation

James proceeds to describe an incredible sequence of events that spans his entire sojourn.

To this day I am amazed by what happened. It is almost as if, the whole time I was away, I was being cradled by something else that was nurturing my experiences. It was like it was filtering my experiences for me. There were a lot of things that could have gone wrong, and there were a lot of things that could have gone right – and they all did go right.

Just before I left for the exchange, one of the lecturers from our university, Richard – someone who meant a great deal to me – passed away. I was asked to speak at a wake, held in his honour. The first thing that happened relates to meeting Richard's sister-in-law, Helen. We got talking and she asked me where I was going overseas. When I explained to her where I was going, she said, "Oh, James, that is just a mile and a half from my place. You have to come and stay."

*The **next** thing that happened was Richard's partner, Carol – whom I had never met, but who was at the wake – made contact with me when I was overseas. She asked me if I would like to attend a family celebration in honour of Richard. It was being held in August in Northumberland where he grew up. It was a wonderful experience; I will never forget it. I got to see Carol and Helen again and I also got to meet Richard's mother. We drove to the other side of England and we climbed and we climbed. Then we came over the top of this hill and it*

was just the most amazing scenery. It was a totally flat landscape, on the moors, and it was covered in purple heather. In the distance was this little cottage where Richard had grown up. I kept getting these flashes, these emotional pangs that would connect me with home. It was a very surreal experience.

***Then,** Helen suggested to me that I should meet up with a friend of her husband's in Aberdeen – David. David was actually a Professor in Architecture at the university I would be attending. I emailed David once I got back to Aberdeen, introducing myself and asking whether there was any research assistant work going. I realised I would need work to help pay the rent. He replied saying, "I would really like to meet you, and if you don't have a place to stay, you are very welcome to come and stay with me for free." I lived with David the whole 18 months I was away.*

It was just one person after another. It was this series of connections with people who knew Richard. I wasn't chasing it. I wasn't consciously trying to make these connections. They just happened. It was also very spiritually nourishing because I got to experience things that I couldn't even begin to fathom why they happened. It wasn't like it was just luck. It wasn't like that. Like, two days after I arrived in Japan on my way over to Scotland, I was just this little year three Architecture student going out into the big, wide world for the first time, and I'm walking around the temple garden and I meet Japan's most famous architect, walking towards me. I rang home straight away and told everyone what happened, but they didn't believe me.

James sits shaking his head, still incredulous at the chain of opportunities that unfolded before him. Seeing James respond like this affirms my own incredulity. I am beginning to understand what he means about being *cradled*.

Such a lot of things happened; it was an intense experience.

Epiphanies

James unpacks his laptop. *You have to see this.* He displays an image for me. I am looking at a dense rooftop urban landscape. There is nothing but buildings for as far as the eye can see, all at odd angles, all differing heights. It looks remarkably like a hurriedly constructed 'house of cards'. The air is heavily polluted.

This is a photo I took from my hostel room in Tokyo on the way over and this was the first time that I had ever been confronted by the reality of exactly what we are doing to the planet. This image stayed with me the whole time I was away. It fired up my ecological consciousness. It was a turning point. I saw things while I was away that made me just think, "It doesn't seem to be able to work. It's not right."

His body language bespeaks of his passion; he gesticulates and repositions himself in his chair – forwards and backwards, mirroring the intensity of his comments. He hurries on.

*Another turning point for me was that just after I had finished classes for the year in June I was invited to attend a global studio for Architecture students from all over the world – Indonesia, Argentina, Ghana, – you name it, they were there. There were about 100 of us. It was a three week intense course, working with an impoverished community in Istanbul in this world heritage listed area called Zeyrek. We were walking around – we had Turkish students translating for us – asking people questions. We were totally unaware of the impact our questions were having on people. We said to this woman, "What would make your life better?" She said, "What would make my life better would be to have my children back, to have my husband back. They were all murdered before we came across the border from Iraq. Now I am living in a house with my one child, it has no roof, it has no running water, I have to send my child to school, but he is sent back home because he is dirty. What **would** make my life better?"*

*I just thought, "Wow, we are way out of our depth here." But the whole project was about architects improving the lives of people rather than viewing architecture as something where you make signature iconic buildings for big corporations. It is not about that at all. Architecture matters to people. That's what you design buildings for – and the environment. It is much more complex than people realise, or want to engage with. Most of the western students in the group, when they saw Zeyrek, were saying, "Gee, this is a real slum." Then the guy from Ghana said, "Compared to where I come from, this is middle class." And the guy from Argentina said the same thing. So, everything is relative. That caused a real change in my perspective on things. Architects have this real knack of being able to talk in very abstract terms about buildings or their job. But I suddenly thought, "Well, being able to say a building is about space or poetry, is not actually doing anything for people. It's good to talk about those things, but **they've got to matter**. They've really got to matter." So, the project I'm working on this year is based on that. It is an empowerment centre for youth in Glasgow. It's a nice way of honouring that whole experience while I was away. Because I'm home now I can step back from it and say, "Ok, let's produce this thing."*

James is able to do what many returnees crave, but are often unable to do: put into action some of their new found convictions. He is doing as well as speaking.

Being marginalised

Despite James's belief that he is *cradled* and *nurtured* during his sojourn, he does experience marginalisation, particularly at the university he attends. He describes his year group as *really good people, all very typical Scots – strong accents and a love for football – who aren't really convinced* that he is Australian because he doesn't *speak with a broad Aussie accent* and *doesn't drink*. As a result, James *feels very different from them*. Yet, the point of strongest contention revolves around his relationship with David.

The fact that I was living with David, the Professor, also made it very hard for me. I wouldn't change it for the world, but it was difficult for me to break into that group because they always saw me as the guy who was living with David. They kept their distance, so that was a bit difficult. Near the end we got closer and I got to know them and we spent some time together, but time was a problem because I was doing so much travelling. I couldn't understand these guys. Here they were living in Aberdeen and Amsterdam, and both being oil cities meant that the return flights were only 50 pounds! That's nothing. I used to think, "You can go anywhere you guys, but you spend all your time here. Over the breaks you should be travelling." The other students just couldn't understand why I was travelling so much. But more than anything, I think it was the lecturers who couldn't deal with that.

It's interesting, even though I was on exchange, the lecturers were expecting me to perform like any other student. I don't mean that I expected them to give me extra credit because I was on exchange, it's just that they were expecting me to put 100% into my study. And I wasn't doing that. I was conscientious and I was producing good work, but I don't know whether they could see that I wasn't working to my full potential or what, but they just weren't happy with the way I was working. For the final crit for the year I pinned up my drawings and the guest critics said, "Interesting, really interesting building, nice approach, beautiful drawings." But my two lecturers said, "We are actually very disappointed in the work you have done. You obviously had a good time because you haven't pushed yourself." My answer to that was, "Yes, I have had a good time. What else do you expect an exchange student to do?" I mean, if I'd wanted a proper, interesting education for the year, I'd have stayed home. That was not what the exchange was about. I mean I was living with David and meeting the most amazing people. Every Wednesday they would have a guest lecturer who

would come to the school, so he would usually have dinner and stay with David for the night. We would talk and I would be introduced to them and it opened up major networks across the UK and other parts of Europe. I wasn't complaining, but it seemed like a grinding point with a lot of the lecturers. It was an interesting situation and I really felt at times that I was being persecuted because of how fortunate I was in my living arrangements with David.

The situation isn't helped by the fact that the university has to *restructure the course* for him. Because so much of the paperwork has been mislaid during the application for the exchange, James is required to enrol in courses not normally available for his year group – courses essential for his eligibility to complete his fifth year at home. James describes that *whole phase of having to adjust to the new school as quite exhausting and something that could have been avoided if their university had made more of an attempt to be accommodating for exchange students*. He believes the university would have been *much happier* if he'd just stuck to the straight year four curriculum and not bothered to muck around. As a result, James *feels like an imposition*. Yet he is able to draw something positive from the experience. *It made me realise how good the Architecture school here at home is. Maybe I was being romantic about home, but I did come to realise that we have a very good school here. They're just so traditional and inflexible over there. If it's tradition, then that's what's used. It's not necessarily the best or most efficient way of doing things, but I got a real sense that the system is imposed upon by tradition.*

*There was this really awful situation with the final assessment piece I had to do. Because of the course muck up, I was doing an overload and I handed in the final assignment a day late. **Here**, if you hand in an assignment a day late then you lose 5 %. **There**, I discovered that if you hand something in a day late you fail! I realised that if I failed this assignment I wouldn't be able to come home and do my fifth year. So, I wrote a letter to the Acting Head of School. I said, "Look, back home – which was probably the worst thing I could have said – we are given a 5 % penalty. We don't fail."*

When results were published, my marks still weren't available, so I went to see my lecturer. He said, "You have been the bane of my existence for the last two weeks. You have no idea of the time and trouble I have had to go through because of your final assessment. James, why couldn't you just let it go?" I explained the implications for my final year of study at home. He then said, "Well, James, I have managed to get you a bare pass. In future I suggest that you are perhaps a little bit more careful about the way you deal with these situations, and also, James, remember that you are living with the Emeritus Professor." And that was that. It was a really disappointing way to end the academic year. I'm not an awkward person and I

*don't chase things unless I think they're worth chasing. But I felt passionately that my situation was unfair. That's what I mean about the school not being accommodating of exchange students. A day, **just a day**; that's all it was.*

But, my experience was about the people and the places. It wasn't about the exchange or the institute. It wasn't about the school.

James's final, unprompted comment, reinforces what has been implicit throughout most of this study's participants' interviews – recognition of the significance of social over academic experiences.

Navigating life in Scotland

David is the one 'throughline' in James's varied overseas experience. Living with David *thr[ows] [James] into a whole new arena*; it has a profound impact on the type and quality of many of his experiences. It is because of David, for example, that James has the opportunity to experience another unique aspect of Scotland – Glasgow – for the last part of his sojourn. These varied social and geographical experiences provide a rich opportunity for reflection on his home culture.

David probably didn't realise how much of an influence he was on me. He is a Scot, but was educated in England, so has a very English manner; it's like this wall that you just can't get through. I find Australians to be very open and easy to talk with, better to be around – emotionally – as well. You know, in England and Scotland, there's this class system; it's amazing, and I really felt that, particularly being Australian. They make a huge number of assumptions based on convict heritage and that sort of stuff. There were things that I would sometimes want to tell David, but him being in the position he was, I couldn't. Sometimes I would want to say, "I'm having a bit of a down day, or I can't be really bothered today", but I couldn't really say it. Even now, I notice with our emailing, he sends them very formally; I send them very informally.

He is a very social creature, but there is a very proper way, a sense of propriety, about the way people present themselves in England. I just thought, "This is bloody codswallop, all this rubbish, the way people talk." Like, when he spoke with his cousin who was a member of the House of Lords, I noticed how he spoke with much greater aplomb. One time I was walking with David and his neurotic Schnauzer, Rex – which I actually loved a great deal – and he turned to me and said, "Oh, by the way, I'm having dinner with the Prince of Wales on

Thursday night, so you can probably cook your own dinner and make sure you feed Rex as well.” I obviously thought he was joking and said, “David, if you’re going to see your daughter on Thursday night, you don’t have to lie about it.” And he looked at me all funny and said, “I am. We are going to meet the Prince of Wales for dinner.” And he did that three times while I was there. Mum and dad believed me when I told them, but no-one else did.

David entertained a lot of people and he had many old friends from Cambridge who came to stay. One night this retired lawyer from London – he must have been about 70 – came with his wife and they were sitting in David’s living room and I came home from a day at uni, all daggily dressed and he says, in his posh voice, “Oh, you’re this student David talks about.” I said, “Yes.” The rest of the conversation went like this:

“Where are you from?”

“I am from Tasmania.”

“Really? Fascinating. And what is the relationship between Tasmania and Australia?”

“Well, actually, they are the same thing. Tasmania is a state of Australia.”

He looked at me all funny and said, “No it isn’t.”

I said, “Yes it is. It has its own independent government, but is governed by the federal government of Australia. I can go and get my passport if you like.”

Then he said, “It absolutely is not. Tasmania is a totally different country. A totally different country.”

And he argued the point with me! I just thought, “This is amazing. You would only have this with the English.”

I disclosed to David at a later point that I sometimes felt like I was an interesting thing, you know, like I was the entertainment to him. I didn’t say it quite like that, but I did point out that there was such a strong sense of class in the UK, and he said, “Well, I hope you don’t feel like that.” But you do. You think Australia is still very colonialist in its attitude, so it can’t be that different from the UK, but it is totally different. Totally different.

For the last six months I lived and worked with David in Glasgow. He moved there to set up a business with his daughter. You know, my whole experience could have been so different if I hadn’t been living with David. I most likely would have come back home for the last six months because I wouldn’t have been able to afford the accommodation. Living with David opened up opportunities for me that never would have existed.

Glasgow wasn't at all like I expected. I had a pretty depressing image in my mind. Glasgow was a great city, very gritty, cosmopolitan, always wet. Edinburgh was basically a big retirement village for English diplomats. But the rest of Scotland, north of Glasgow and Edinburgh, is the most amazing country. And on the west coast, it was just like home – very wet and the same sorts of ferns and forests, but not gum trees. The east coast had such haunting landscapes, like nothing I had ever seen. It was so rich with culture. In the distance you could see stone circles, ruined castles and remnants of human settlement, everywhere. I came to appreciate the consistency in the cultural heritage in Scotland. It is thousands of years old. I said to David that in Australia we just couldn't comprehend that – a culture thousands of years old – and yet we do in fact have a culture that existed 60 000 years ago, but we don't appreciate it. You know, all the time I was there, there was something that was reminding me of home and making me see it in a completely different way. That is probably the first thing that happens to you when you go overseas, and it is the most consistent thing right throughout your journey, you always relate back to what you understand and what you are familiar with, and that's home.

People say that homesickness will get you for the first couple of months and then you will get over it. But you don't. I met my cousin while I was away. She's been working in England for 6 or 7 years now and she still gets homesick. She was really pleased to see me and we really hit it off together. I think it was intensified because we both had similar feelings about home. We wanted a connection and we found it in each other. We were both missing familiarity. Familiarity was the bottom line. The way people interact with other people, on a day-to-day level was so different, like in the supermarket and in pubs. So, meeting my cousin and having that sense of familiarity – being able to say something and immediately be understood – was great.

James is describing a classic condition of culture shock – disorientation associated with loss of familiar cues (see, for example, Brick, 2004; Oberg, 1960). Yet, brief moments of familiarity do not render you immune from homesickness.

If ever I was on my own, then homesickness would linger, but if I could just keep myself busy, then it was ok. When I was in Scandinavia there was this huge snow storm that came through Stockholm and I went out – as any dedicated Architecture student does – and photographed the buildings in the middle of the blizzard. I couldn't really do anything the following day because the city was covered in snow. I was cold and hungry. I really started thinking about homesickness because I knew I would be home in a month.

James's European experience bifurcates his loyalties. He appreciates the uniqueness of life in Scotland, particularly, but craves the familiarity of home.

The exchange was a means to an end. The journey – the experiences overseas – not the institution I went to or the lecturers I had, was what really mattered.

Being home

Being home is difficult for James; it is nothing like he expected. He has been absent from his home culture for 18 months. He is no longer the same person who left. His family, friends and colleagues are unsure how to respond to this changed person. In turn, James is destabilised by their uncertainty, as well as by his own sense of disequilibrium in a place in which he once felt 'at home'. The first six months home is a period of intense emotional, behavioural and cognitive challenges for James.

Reconnecting

It is a sad irony that James's first reconnection with Australian culture is so positive and reaffirming, albeit brief; it masks many of the difficulties that lay ahead. The only constant positive re-entry experience that James has in his home culture during the first six months home is in relation to the physical environment.

After two months

I will never forget the night I came back. I arrived in Sydney after a long flight from London. Carol – Richard's partner – had said to me, "Richard and I bought a house in Sydney; it's in the National Park. You can come and stay with me for a week or two, get yourself gently back into Australian life." I thought it was a good idea because I had an inkling that if I was going to come back immediately to [my small home town], it would be such a shock. I didn't know how I was going to cope.

James's self-imposed "decompression chamber", borne from an *inkling*, reflects the benefits of such a neutral space espoused in the re-entry literature (Weaver, 1994, p. 235).

I remember getting off the plane and I saw the guy at the immigration desk. He was the first proper Australian that I heard. It was the most laconic voice. He looked at my passport and said, "G'day, mate. Where have you been?" Every other experience I had overseas, you passed over your Australian passport and they fired questions at you, particularly in London.

You know, "What are you doing here?" It was just so coarse and terse. So, coming back to Australia and having that very open, 'Welcome back' was great.

We got into the car and drove in the dark. We drove past Botany Bay heading towards the National Park out of Sydney. I wound my window down and it was just the heat, the smell of the eucalypts and the cicadas. It just hit me. I couldn't believe those things. I hadn't thought about them while I was away, but I missed them so much. So, the whole way in the car, I was like one of those blue heelers, you know, with its head hanging out the window and tongue going everywhere. That was a really wonderful way to come home.

I travelled up to Mackay to see my Aunt, whom I hadn't seen for six years. I was still travelling. I was being independent and sort of just jumping from person to person. And then from there I came straight home, and ah, yeah, it just felt like I had never been away, but there was this massive dream that I just had, that I couldn't share with anyone. I knew it, as soon as I got off the plane and saw everyone again, my little brother is not so little anymore, my sister has become a lady – or a woman; they were the things that I noticed. But I just felt, you know, this is just home. I know, this is just it. Coming home back to Australia, but not actually being home with family to start with, yeah, it did something. It made me think, or it made me realize what it meant to be back in Australia.

Whereas some of the other participants in this study believed they came to truly appreciate the qualities of their home culture only upon re-entry, James constantly reflected on this uniqueness while overseas.

All the time I was away I was having these intense experiences, constantly thinking about home, constantly thinking about how I didn't appreciate what I had before I left. And coming back I see the hills over the plain and the river in a completely different way. I see them whereas before I didn't. It intensifies something in you. One night, probably four weeks after I got back, there was this most amazing moon rise. The moon came out and the sky was like someone had just drawn lines with clouds, straight across the sky – all the way up and the way the moon shone, it shone up through the layers of clouds, so this line of light went through the sky with all of these patterns. I said, "Look at that; that's amazing," and you know, Mum and Dad were like, "What on earth are you talking about? Oh, he's changed." The world doesn't change; it is just the way you see it that changes.

This is the first of many examples that James shares about others' difficulty in coming to terms with the 'new James'. His final comment causes me to reflect on Marcel Proust's

assertion: “The only real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes but in having new eyes” (cited in Fleming, 1997, p. 95). James has new eyes; his parents have yet to make that discovery.

After four months

Like Lynette and Rebecca, James’s appreciation of the natural environment in Tasmania intensifies, rather than diminishes, with the passing of time.

One of the huge positives I’m experiencing about being home is appreciating this place. It is the simplest things – looking at the sunset and realising there isn’t a sunset in the world that looks like that. There aren’t hills that have the blue hue that Tasmanian hills have. I could never do that before. I think it has to do with the fact that the very dense urban situation and the living conditions I had in Europe were not like anything I have at home.

I found myself constantly thinking about and craving, while I was away, this place we went to when we were children – Lobster Bay. It’s basically where I grew up. All the most fundamental things I know and remember are from that place. It’s a very important place in my life and it felt important while I was away. But I knew on the surface that I could never go back to it, because it doesn’t exist anymore. I can’t go back to that place because it is just a memory. I still haven’t been back. It will be a big point when I do go back. I think I will probably set myself up for disappointment because of that whole thing your mind does to stories and moments – turns them into myths. You go back and the place is a lot smaller than you remember and there aren’t as many trees and the beach is not the same, you know. But I still know that that place is particularly important to me.

James is describing a common characteristic of many sojourners – the tendency to ‘romanticise’ aspects of their home culture while away (see, for example, Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Osland, 1995; Werkman, 1980). This inevitably results in disappointment when expectations are not matched by the reality of home.

After six months

I went back to Lobster Bay recently, for five days, with a group of friends from uni. I thought, “My eyes have told my mind lies and now my mind, no matter what my eyes see, sees something else.” But my ears and my smell don’t tell lies. They are honest. If I smell something, the most vivid memories come back. I don’t see it the way it really is anymore, even though I’ve just been there. I see it the way I experienced it as a child. It is the strangest

feeling. While I was there I drew and painted a lot. Just to satisfy myself I ended up drawing what I remembered it to be, just so I could see it. It really is very strange.

James is seeking from the physical environment that sense of stability and continuity that eludes him affectively and cognitively.

Loss of common ground

Inability to relate effectively to family, friends or colleagues is the cause of much inner soul searching for James. He searches within and without for explanations and solutions to this dilemma. This process dominates his first six months home.

After two months

A lot of people I know haven't travelled and very few people in my family have travelled, interstate even. I don't wish to sound pretentious, but I see now that a lot of them aren't as open-minded, so it is difficult to communicate with them about certain experiences. Whereas, at uni, or when I'm talking with Carol, it is easier to talk about those things. I just want to get so much off my chest that I can't talk about with anyone else. Someone asks you to try and explain your time away and you can't. All you can say is, "It was great."

How **do** you sum up 18 months of life-changing experience in just one sentence?

*I love my mother and father a great deal, but it's very difficult when you've been away and then come back. You've been on your own for 18 months, you've travelled places on your own, jumped on and off planes, walked through huge cities in the middle of the night, doing all those sorts of things they say you should never do – you know, "Make sure you're warm." When I came back, that all started again. Mum and dad say, "Are you warm enough? Have you got enough clothes? Don't go out too late." And even though I objected, mum still insisted on making me lunch to take to uni every day, just like she has done since I've been in kindergarten. I just want to **scream**! I just want to go again. It really does make you feel like that. It's about freedom, but it's also about the closeness of the family. My family is extremely important to me, so access to them is important, but I just feel like I am on a completely different level now. Things have changed with them as well, I know, but it just feels like there is a huge crossing that has no bridge. I don't know how I am going to fix that.*

James's solicitude is tangible. He sits with his arms wrapped around his body. He moves one hand slowly to his forehead and rubs it gently, lost in thought. This is in stark contrast to his earlier energetic sharing. Now he looks out the window in quiet contemplation.

I am living with my grandmother now. She lives just up the hill from uni. So, I have an outlet, in a sense. I can talk with her about things, but she's also had very confined overseas experiences. From a practical point of view, living with her is convenient. It's just four minutes up the road. She lives by herself and her house has four bedrooms and I can use the rumpus room as my study. So, I can just be quiet and think about all the things that have built up from my experience without feeling like I'm being pulled back into a family network that perhaps doesn't really fit me anymore.

In a sense, James is creating his own decompression chamber at home.

It's an unspoken obstacle that you have to face when you come back – fitting back in with your family. I wasn't prepared for that. No-one told me that would happen.

'Expectations' – those of the returnee themselves and of others at home – has been a dominant theme in re-entry literature for the last five decades, since the seminal work of Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963). I can't help but feel saddened that some of James's difficulties might have been ameliorated had he had access to this knowledge. He shares a specific example of his parents' expectations of him.

When I came back mum and dad had installed an air conditioner. It wasn't really necessary; they only need to open a couple of windows. So I asked them, "Why did you install an air conditioner?" And immediately they replied, "Oh, you have changed. You have changed, haven't you." So, it is very difficult. I had a really interesting conversation about it with Dad, particularly, while we were sitting around the table; my mother's mother was there too. Dad said, "You know, all this crap about this heat pump, I don't understand where it has come from." And I said, "Well, the way I see it Dad, when I was travelling, I did a lot of thinking, and I saw big cities like Tokyo smothered in pollution. You have got no idea how awful it was, and it just got me thinking, you know, how on earth can we continue to live like that? It is not feasible. That is the bottom line. So everything I do now I see as either a contribution to a good, to the positive side of the argument or the negative. The same way with this heat pump, you didn't actually need it; you have lived in this house for 10 years. You have never needed a heat pump, but you have got one because your brother has one and the man across the road from nan has one and nan has one. It just seems like, you know, it doesn't make

sense to me and being an architect who thinks in terms of the way buildings can sit in the landscape and suit the purpose for which they are designed and built, air conditioning is a real no no for me.” And I said a couple of other things about certain statistics, but my Dad got to the point in the conversation where he said, “Son, I can’t do anything about that. So I don’t bother”. He said, “No one can do anything about that,” and I said, “Well, actually it takes one person. That’s all. And if everyone was to do that, it would make a huge difference”, at which point, my grandmother said, “Yes Bill, James has travelled and seen a lot of things.” So, it gets very difficult; it always goes back to things I have done. He is going to take the opposite view because he is my father and in a sense he feels he needs to. You know, like, me presenting the argument I presented, I was undermining him. I was starting to do that before I left, I was starting to become my own person, but now, I am not anything like he expected I would be when I came back and I have come back with all of these convictions that he doesn’t know. “Where the hell have all of these come from?” he asks.

I ask James about other family members’ reactions to him. He reads a pre-prepared vignette from a single sheet of paper.

The first time I saw a great aunt of mine, soon after I arrived home, I had a very clear feeling that I was an unwelcome interference. Perhaps it was the shock of the moment as I parked my car next to hers at the shopping centre as she was loading her groceries in the car. It was the first time she had seen me since I was back. But the response I received when I said hello to her was slightly uncharacteristically cold. Some of my closer family members have reacted in a similar way. There seems to be a tendency or an impulse to react in a certain manner, what could be described as a falseness. In many cases it is presumably because of the physical changes I have undergone. Seeing people for the first time since being back is an interesting exercise. I never quite know how others are going to react and in some instances I find myself avoiding certain interactions because of this uncertainty.

James lowers the paper and makes eye contact with me.

So, a lot of times when I have had family members – aunts and uncles and cousins – who have had gatherings and, they have rung Mum and Dad or one of my brothers or whatever and said, “Come over and bring James”, I tend to think twice about going because of all of the, you know, “Oh you have an accent, and you have grown your hair, oh and...” I don’t know, I don’t want to sound, sort of peevish, but it does feel very draining at times.

Because I have changed so much, they don't see the same James that left, coming home, and that must confuse them a great deal. I know it certainly has confused Mum and Dad and my closest friends. They are unsure about how to relate to me and what it all means, these experiences. Also, they have only heard small parts, and usually the most interesting parts. Not the full story board. They only know of single events and in some cases, those events have been slightly exaggerated by the time they get, reach certain people. So I find that really frustrating to have to say, "Well, no, that is not what actually happened."

You know, when you travel there aren't the inhibitions there anymore and you don't need to be the certain person you're being framed as by your family or social group. You can throw that out the door and be someone completely different. You can just be who you want to be. There is no commitment. I didn't feel obligated in Scotland to have to be the person I was back home.

After only two months home, James is able to consider others' perspectives on his re-entry, not just his own. He is aware that he's changed and that this is likely to have confused others. James attaches no blame to this, but rather seeks a rational explanation for perspectives and behaviours that he experiences primarily as *frustrating*.

After four months

As James walks in the door for our second interview I notice that his hair is considerably shorter than last time we spoke. He still wears the same broad, warm smile, belying the emotional angst he is experiencing.

One of the biggest things I've had to struggle with, going away and then coming home, is expectations of other people. You go away and you have such a wonderful experience. You don't expect to feel the way you do when you come back. Most of it has to do with how I feel emotionally. Because of the intensity of this experience there is this intensity of emotion. I think back to what I was doing six months ago and it makes me frustrated. Frustration is probably the most prevalent feeling.

I feel very stifled at the minute from every angle. From a family point of view, I have become so independent, but they still want to parent me. For example, recently mum and dad went to visit nan – her house is just 15 minutes walk from uni, so I walk every day if I can. Mum and dad noticed my car in the driveway. It had been raining that day. Dad said to me later, "You have just had your car fixed, why don't you drive it?" I replied, "Well, if I don't need my car I don't use it. Most of the time I was away I walked kilometres and kilometres with a 30

kilogram pack on my back just to get to a hotel, so it's no big deal. If I drive my car when I don't need to drive my car, then I am putting, carbon monoxide in to the air, and it doesn't need to be there."

Another thing that happened recently was I planned to travel to Portside to see the opening of a friend's exhibition. It was only overnight and it was going to give me the opportunity to catch up with some friends in this city that I hadn't seen since coming home. But mum and dad were extremely reluctant for me to go. It was difficult to comprehend. I have undergone this massive personal change and consequently feel more independent, but there seems to be this tendency for things to continue for everyone else. They don't recognise the change I feel so strongly. As it turned out my car needed a new muffler so the trip was cancelled, but I did confront mum and dad over it. My brother, who is two years younger than me, drove to Portside on the weekend prior: no comment was made to him. I tried to tell mum and dad how stifled I felt. All they said was, "Well, we're happy you didn't go; there was an accident on that highway last weekend." They've got no idea of some of the situations I've been in overseas. It is very frustrating.

James uses the word *frustrating* many times throughout the first two interviews. Like so many times during the three interviews, James consistently considers others' perspectives: *mum and dad must feel very helpless in a way. I'm sure they know the reality of the situation, but they don't want to hear it.*

I am somewhat amused to discover that James's recent haircut features in his storytelling.

I overheard this phone conversation between mum and nan. I heard nan say, "No, no, not really." I found out that the conversation went basically like this:

"Is it cut properly? Is it short? Is it any different to what it was before?"

"No, not really."

The first thing mum said when she saw me was, "Your hair is not short enough." It is frustrating for me because mum and dad hardly ever fuss over my younger brother like that; he's moved into a house with his partner and they're about to have their first child. That causes a bit of friction between my brother and me because he sees that as a form of favouritism.

James's nan is more gentle in her efforts to reconnect with her grandson's newly found ideology. She tip-toes around him, gently probing to see where he stands on things. *"I suppose you are going to vote for the Greens?" she asked me the other day. Then, after*

seeing a program on television about aboriginal living conditions, she asked me, “What do you think about that?” I have this feeling that the closest members of my family are still fishing to find out exactly where I am.

I suppose if you were to think about it really hard before you left, you would realize that you would end up in a situation where you had very few people who can empathise with you when you get back. I don't know what I thought, actually. I don't know what I was thinking would be different about me by the time I got back. The condition hasn't changed, but the object has – me. It's interesting because, equally relevant is, how do I treat mum and dad? They haven't actually changed that much, but the way I see them has changed, and therefore in my eyes they have changed. I now feel less a part of that unit. I'm still a member of the family, but I just feel much more as though I'm orbiting my own system.

James's sense of marginalization extends beyond his family setting. He feels it very keenly at university, but for different reasons.

People I'm not so familiar with make assumptions and extend me further than I can actually go – the opposite to what my family is doing. So, it's really one or the other, with nowhere in between. Before I went away, people didn't place expectations on me because they weren't aware of any difference in me. Perhaps it has to do with the way I relate to people now, or the way that they see me. Obviously my external appearance has changed and people who knew me prior to leaving see that change and it signals something else for them. Sometimes I wonder if they see me as a threat, but I want to suppress that thought because I actually think it is more about me than about them. I am constantly thinking to myself that people are threatened by me and/or my experience and/or my manner and they know that it doesn't sort of fit.

At this point, James leans over and pulls out from his folder a black ink drawing on a white A4 sheet of paper. It consists of three, vertical block towers. The central tower is narrower and has just one figure standing on top. The other two adjacent towers have many figures standing on top. *It is very literal. It is very anti-architectonic, but explains in very simple terms the loss of common ground I feel. It can be a positive thing because I can move in my own direction, but mostly it shows that the continuity I previously had with my family and my colleagues is disjointed and I am now having to re-form it in my own way. It is proving to be a very difficult task – but worth it all the same.*

I am finding that I am closing off from other people who don't know me as well as my family, which is really ironic because they are probably the only people that I can hope to relate to. In my relationships with colleagues and friends, I find that there are more expectations placed on my understanding or my interpretation. It's difficult to describe a single scenario because the experience exists as a series of moments in my memory. One example is that I often find it difficult to maintain a level conversation with peers. I either find some of them overly submissive in their arguments or completely at the opposite end of the scale – I find some are ferocious in their defense of their arguments. Just talking is a difficult thing to do and I tend not to do as much as before, prior to the exchange, with people I don't know so well. I don't seem to have the same issue with many of my closest friends. In these situations I find myself being very self aware so, I think it has a lot to do with image.

In the recent few weeks, we have done group projects and it was very difficult to work in the group because people, if I would say something, they would just go with it, and I ended up not saying anything, because I just thought, I will shut up, because if I say something they are going to go with it. And it wasn't working with a group because it was killing the conversation all the time so I became very self aware and I thought to myself how can I say that, how can I say this? It is exhausting doing that all the time. Anyway, at the end of our presentation that was picked up on: it was noticed by the lecturer and the group suffered because of it. Basically, I felt guilty because it was almost as if I had engineered the whole thing and the lecturer saw that and commented and said, "This project could have been done by a single person, not the group." I am craving just to have a conversation, not for them to say, "You are absolutely wrong, or you are absolutely right", just to have a conversation, but it is really difficult to do. This probably has something else to do with it: prior to leaving for six months, I tutored this year group for a few months. They were in the year below me at that time, but they were the group I returned to in my fifth year. But that year has changed a lot as well. There are a lot of people in there that weren't in there previously.

It is very frustrating. I find that even lecturers are starting to notice it. It is moving up into that very dangerous area when the lecturer starts to see you in a certain way and I don't want to be seen like that. I certainly don't want to be seen like that because I have never liked that in other people or myself. So I don't pursue it. So, I'm tending to be very reluctant about establishing my own position. It starts to get to a point where you feel paranoid. I would actually love to see what people are thinking as they are talking to me, because I know there is something there. That's what I mean about paranoia – I don't know if there actually is, but I just feel like there is all the time. I feel like I'm tiptoeing around everyone. It is very difficult, very difficult. I get to the point where I just think, "Stuff this." I had dinner with the

professor when I arrived back, and I know that would never have happened if I hadn't gone away, but some of the other staff got to find out about it and they were a bit funny about it. That's where you have to be careful. I really do get frustrated, particularly with all the pressure on with studies.

*I was thinking about that the other night actually, I was trying to sort my head out for this massive amount of work they want us to do in fifth year and I just thought, "I have made it so much harder for myself because of going away." Like in the case the other day, I saw my lecturer in the foyer, and I said, "Look, I am having a bit of trouble bringing your point of view and the other lecturer's point of view together." She said, "Oh, you'll manage," and just walked away. She said, "I know you can do it." You can do it; it is no problem. It is really frustrating because I **can't** do it, and I need some assistance. I ended up writing an email and saying I really need help.*

That is frustrating and that makes it harder because you are no longer seen as a student: you are seen as someone who has had all these experiences, going to graduate soon, should know his stuff inside out. Going to do a good job anyway. We just finished a group assignment. We ended up getting a pass and that is the first time I have received a pass ever. And it really hit hard. Like it really took the wind out of my sails. The whole group was really disappointed and they couldn't understand why that happened, because, "Oh, we had James in our group and we got a Pass?" Because I hear it all the time, "Oh yeah, we'll have James in our group." But, you know, I don't offer them anymore than they can offer me, but people assume that you can. People know you as "the top student who did really well and went away and had an amazing time, gave a lecture when he came back, did some teaching in fifth year, knows the professor" and all that sort of stuff and it is very dangerous for me. I don't feel very comfortable at the minute. And I find myself constantly going over things in my head and putting scenarios together. Why did that happen? It nearly always comes back to this thing of people making assumptions and feeling threatened, I suppose. I feel as threatened as they do.

Both James and his friends and colleagues are finding it difficult to reconcile the 'new James' with the 'old James'.

So, I try particularly hard now with my friends. Part of the difficulty in engaging with them is that they're not entirely sure what has happened. I have changed, but they don't know exactly what that means. So, it has sort of meant that I have shifted the way I see myself in the group situation. Prior to leaving I was friends with everyone in my year group – Malaysian students,

people that were very quiet, people that were very noisy. I was friends with all of them and generally I was considered a point of contact for the rest of the class. I was nominated, whether I wanted to be or not, the class representative. That was just the way it was, because everyone knew me. But now I am finding that I am tending to step out of that, and I need to fit myself into a segment, tending to become more of that segmentation that occurs in the year, rather than trying to be a bridge – which is not a good thing. I think being a bridge is much better and actually it's interesting because a comment was made by one of the lecturers who said that, that's what he called me, he said, "You were a bridge. You were a bridge in the year that I taught. And you were a bridge in a lot of other years." He didn't say that had changed, but I knew it had.

James's reference to the term *bridge* is ironic. Some studies have shown that returnees are better equipped upon re-entry to act as a "bridge" (Wilson, 1993c, p. 470) between disparate groups or individuals – to be "mediating persons" (Bochner, 1986, p. 347; Wilson, 1985, p. 285). Clearly, the reverse has happened in James's situation.

After six months

James's curls have disappeared; his hair is now cut close to his head. At first, I ponder the notion that his successively shortened hair is, in some ways, a metaphor for his re-entry – a gradual return to old patterns – as he now seems visibly less angst-ridden about his re-entry; he has finally found some common ground, particularly with uni friends. Yet, much underlying tension remains. James has not fully re-integrated into his home culture.

I'm not so worried anymore about my relatives' inability to relate to me or understand how and why I'm different as a result of my travel. It is not my problem; it's theirs. I don't seem so precious about all of that. I think that has a lot to do with me finding my place again and just finding some level of comfort. And I have found it, and now, all of that doesn't matter. Before, I saw it as an obstacle.

Uni has finished for the semester, so I've moved out of nan's and back home. I am now back into a very familiar situation without any other focus – uni or anything else. It's making me want to go again – overseas – but it is a good thing. I come from a very solid family base – I don't feel disjointed in that sense – and I can just propel myself from that foundation all the time. That's what I'm feeling more and more now because I am at an age where that should be happening.

Mum and dad are much less demanding from the point of view of being in the family. I think they are catching on. Well, I am too, probably. But I feel so much more comfortable on my own, away from the family situation – as long as I can go back when I please. But I can't live independently because of financial reasons. Living with nan is a good compromise. My relationship with my younger brother is still pretty strained. He's taken up smoking again. It's almost as if he is giving reasons for people to go at him. My relationship with my youngest brother – he's 14 – is different now. He was 11 when I left. It's much more like having a conversation with an adult than a child now. So, I am quite close to him. And I have a sister; she's 13. The thing I notice about the two of them is that they always want to get very close to me all the time – physically. The other day, we were sitting on the couch, one of them on each side of me. My sister is leaning on me and my brother is about one centimetre away from me telling me something that took ages to tell. I ended up exploding. They said, "What's your problem?" Then they said, "Ooh, we're not allowed to talk to James anymore." I'm just thinking, "Oh, God!" They have to touch me. If they are walking past, they have to touch me! It is sort of funny. When I came back they really didn't know how to react to me.

Even though things are improving with my uni friends, I find that my level of self-awareness is still very prominent. I've just been away for five days with a group of friends from uni. It was great. I formed and reaffirmed some really wonderful friendships. I feel as though I belong to the group much more than I did before, and it's as though they feel that, too. It was quite a nice feeling as we left. It was interesting because at the end of the last day people said to me, "It has been good to be able to get to know you and see you as you were." There were so many things that were different about me, physically, when I came back, especially my hair and my accent. My relatives and my friends found that slightly confronting and I didn't want to address it. I became very conscious of that. To my relief, my accent has toned down a bit and I am starting to adopt a bit more of the slang.

Despite feeling more comfortable with his life in his home culture, James still experiences frustration over others' perceived attempts to marginalise him.

One thing that happened while I was away with this group of people, though, someone asked me what I am going to do when I finish, in front of everyone. And, I said, "I don't know," and they said, "Oh yeah, bullshit you don't know. We know that you are going to do something pretty amazing. You are going to put the world on fire." And as nice as that was for them to say that, it pushed me out of the circle again. It was almost as if, again, no matter what I said about that, they had made up their mind. And that's the way I felt right through

the course actually and probably will continue to feel – that, there's that level of presumption that people make based on the little that they know of you. I wasn't so worried about the fact that they were thinking what they were thinking. I was more put out by the fact that they said it in front of everyone else. Because that made me feel external to the rest of the group very quickly. They don't realize that that is what it does and that is why I don't talk about it because people are always looking for a point of difference. And I don't want that, having difficulty with the accent and people presuming that because you have an accent you weren't born in Tasmania. Like there was one guy, I went to an exhibition opening recently, and a second year walked up to me and said, "So what is your story? And I said, "What do you mean". "Well", he said, "You have got an accent, you are obviously not born here, you are from England, so why are you here? Why did you do the course here?" I said, "Let's go back. First of all I was born here, I am Tasmanian and I spent the last 18 months on exchange." "Why have you got that accent then?" So, you know, in a way, people don't realize just how personal or how much of an affront some of those questions can be. I don't do that with others because I am conscious of that. There is a whole other level of integration that is stopped because of that. Because people are always wondering about you, they don't just accept you. There is always that level of difficulty in becoming part of the group.

Inbetweenness

After six months

Two recent incidents rupture James's sense of re-absorption into familiarity. One is contact with classmates from his Scottish university, the other, the arrival of a shipping container he sent from Scotland six months ago.

The guys from my exchange university are putting together a DVD. They wrote an email saying, "We are putting together this DVD and we have got some photos of you. We want you to fill out this questionnaire." And just in filling out the questionnaire and thinking about what happened, it sort of brought back all of these memories. It's almost like another life that I can dip into every now and then, that I am reminded of, but coming back here it is just like it is an intermission. Like a dream almost on another level. I know I was a different person overseas – we've talked about that before, but that's sort of reaffirmed again and again when I'm at home and then put in the situation where I think about lots of things.

The other thing that happened was just a couple of weeks ago I received most of the boxes that I sent from Scotland by ship. It was strange opening those boxes. Memories just came flooding back, but I really couldn't share them because there wasn't that level of shared

understanding. You know, "Oh, gee, I got this book when I visited this particular house with this particular person." No-one else here knows that place or that person.

It occurs to me what a distinct advantage it must be for both Marie and Rebecca to be experiencing re-entry with others who have the same shared experience.

I was alone when I opened part of it. I spent a lot of time going through those things on my own because it felt like that was a good thing to do. What I did was, I opened all the boxes, spread all the stuff out everywhere and then grabbed the pieces that I thought would make sense to people if I told them. So, I grabbed all those things, took them upstairs and put them on the dining room table. I showed everyone; I was so enthusiastic, but everyone else was busy. I said, "Would you just come and look at this now." You just want to tell everyone all the details, even if they're not interested. I actually told my family that I felt really peculiar after seeing all the things in the boxes, really homesick for Glasgow. I didn't expect that, and they certainly didn't expect that.

I put so many things in there that I didn't need to, like a pair of slippers! There were lots of books – I have never bought so many books. It was good going back through and reminding myself of what I have got. There was this timber porridge stirrer. What do they call it? A spurtle! David gave it to me. I remember we went to this little timber workshop that was all run by a waterwheel and there were all these belts running through the workshop covered in saw dust, absolutely covered. There was no wall; it was just like this cave, a sauna. It must have been terrible working there. He just sat there all day turning out things like potato mashers.

The best word to describe how I felt when I opened the boxes is 'otherness'. It was a really funny sensation, not really anything in particular, just a sense of it being another part of me that's not necessarily evident to people now. There was so much difference in that pile, of who I was, and what I am now. It was sort of an expression of a different me. That I was happy to go and explore. I think I had forgotten just how rich my experiences were until I was reminded of them. As a consequence of opening all the boxes, I rang David. It was the first time I'd had phone contact with him since coming back because he moves around constantly. It was really good to talk to him.

James mentions that David is planning to visit Tasmania the following year. This prompts me ask James about his plans for the next year, primarily to discover whether he will be around to experience David's visit.

You know, it's funny because during the last week I have had probably a dozen people ask that question. I don't know why people ask that question so much. It's not the same person asking the question all the time – people in my family, in my uni year group and lecturers all ask that. I will definitely be here for David. After all he did for me, I'll be here for him. But, after that, I think I'll be off. Maybe I'll just jump on the plane and go back.

Some of the things I received in the boxes were part of my professional project, images of my site and aerial shots of the city. I felt this sudden wave of homesickness. But I am conscious of the fact that if I leave home again I will just get so homesick because it got the point where all I did when I was away was crave this place. I just craved it so much. I don't know if it had to do with where I was in Glasgow, which can be slightly oppressing, you know, very gritty and dense and urban. Perhaps it has more to do with the fact that this is such a wonderful place. Maybe it's a combination of the two. There is a certain sense of connection to this place that I don't think I can maintain anywhere else, and if I leave again...I suppose I have to figure out what is feeding the desire to leave, then determine whether that is actually worth the compromise of losing this place. I do think that it is sort of an inbetweeness now, this feeling, and I don't know whether it will subside. I don't know; at the moment I feel so utterly lost.

I am reminded of something I wrote in my own journal after returning from overseas: I want to be here; I want to be there.

I do feel uneasy at the moment, like it all seems very prosaic. I am finding the family situation so claustrophobic and maybe that's what's feeding the desire to be somewhere else. But I feel so guilty about it. I'm not sure why. The sorts of decisions and sacrifices you make when you take those lunges are like huge leaps of faith. In a sense you get as much as you give. I think to myself now that if I am going to do it again, I am going to challenge myself to go somewhere different.

Maybe I should go again, because everything is as it was, and seems to me, always will be.

Those 18 months away were life changing. I'm craving that again.

The getting of wisdom

James describes a clearly discernible shift, as a direct result of his overseas experience, from latent to manifest representations of his convictions.

After two months

Now, more than ever, I have certain concerns that I follow very passionately. Before they were very latent and not so prevalent in the way I presented myself. Whereas now, I have come back and I am very forceful about things I believe in. I'm much more passionate about certain issues. For example, the current project I'm working on is designing an Australian pavilion for the Venice Vianelli. It's a project that's never been done before, so you really have to rely on yourself. This project is almost an analogy of me – how can I be who I am, in another place.

*It's been very interesting because it's made me really think, "What is Australia?" I've been thinking about that question for the last two years. Suddenly I can apply it to a building and my first presentation sub-consciously became this indictment of the way that Australia – European Australia – has treated its indigenous people. I didn't even realise that that was what I was doing. I pinned it up on the wall and I thought, "There's only one direction that this is heading!" I put up a whole series of images – 'Is Australia a Hero?' 'Is Australia the Eucalypt?' 'Is Australia Colonialist Pastiche?' **Then**, the last image was 'Is Australia Racist?' It was an image of an Australian aborigine in a house made of sticks, a government house they had given them as compensation, next to the image of 'Is Australia Colonialist Pastiche?' which was a massive, what we call, 'McMansion', in Queensland – totally unsuitable for the environment. I thought, "Gee, this has affected me much more than I realised."*

So I am very sensitive to that sort of stuff now and even marginalised people generally, the poor, and I am looking more and more at opportunities to do something in my professional life that aids their situation.

After four months

James is even more convinced of the efficacy of his newly realised convictions, but learns that such unequivocal convictions can come at a cost.

I think I've become much more considered. Prior to leaving, I thought a great deal about things, but I tend to think about them in a more specific sense now. It's much more of a focus for me now. There is no doubt in my mind that this particular road is the right road. I will

accept other people's points of view, but there is no way that any argument will change that path for me. I realise now that it's ok to be like that. This is not something I am just dabbling in. It is a very strong conviction. All the events, all the moments merged into this one theme – the sustainability of our planet. I've come to realise that it is ok to have strong convictions, but strong convictions usually mean that, in order to understand you, people make associations and stereotype you, and that is not what you want because it is not your understanding. I just don't see the value anymore in doing something because everyone else is doing it.

After six months

*Perhaps that is what this whole trip has given me – very strong convictions about things. It just all makes sense now. This whole trip has given me a basis for understanding the world. But the trade-off for that new found understanding is how you present yourself to others. My personality and my character traits are all now things I express rather than suppress. It is **the** most important thing that happened.*

James's comments epitomise Kierkegaard's belief that "life is lived forward, but understood backwards" (cited in Vialle, Lysaght & Verenikina, 2000, p. 183).

Final words

It changes you. Don't underestimate how much it will change you. It makes you a completely different person. I see now that the first time is always the most interesting – never having been away and then jumping into it. After having that sort of experience it is inevitable that I will want to go away again. There are too many opportunities sitting there waiting. Even though so much has happened as a result of the travel, I would still jump at the chance.

As James and I bid each other farewell, I reflect on how much I have enjoyed and appreciated the all-too-fleeting window into this young man's mind. I feel both sadness and disbelief over the suddenness and permanence of the ending of our research relationship. Even though it is something I have anticipated, I still feel the wrenching of the "extraordinary distance" that is about to unfold (Patai cited in Pitts & Miller-Day, 2007, p. 178). Research is as much an emotional journey as an intellectual one.

Making meaning

How prior experience affected the re-entry

This was James's first overseas and, therefore, first re-entry experience – a watershed time in his life. Both experiences – living overseas and coming home – had a profound and enduring effect on him. Yet, they were not mutually exclusive experiences; understanding the circumstances of his overseas life helps to illuminate many aspects of his re-entry experience. Life overseas was clearly juxtaposed with the life he had previously experienced at home; he lived in a dense urban environment, not a small rural town; he lived alone with an aging professor, not a large, close-knit family; he studied in virtual isolation, marginalised from university peers, not in a small, supportive, communal school where he was revered as a talented student; and he travelled extensively – mostly alone – enjoying a *cultural bombardment*, not a *prosaic* life with family and friends within his small home state. That he would return a changed person as a result of such strongly contrasting experiences, was inevitable.

James underwent considerable change as a person during his overseas sojourn – physically, affectively and cognitively. The James that came home was not the same James that left 18 months earlier. While some of these changes were directly related to the length of time away from his home culture – physical changes such as length of hair and accent, for example – the more significant and enduring changes were related to the many, varied experiences to which he had been exposed. It is 'change' that directly binds his overseas experience with his re-entry experience.

Physical changes clearly destabilised many members of James's family, his friends and colleagues. While not in themselves necessarily representative of anything more than the temporal nature of his sojourn, they were, nonetheless, representative of a 'different' James, a difference that was increasingly exposed through discussion and behaviour. This difference became the source of much consternation for others: *what on earth are you talking about?; oh, he's changed; so, what is your story – you've got an accent, so you were obviously not born here, so why are you here?* That James was tired, by the end of six months home, of the difficulties associated with this physical difference was apparent from two things, in particular: first, his decision to have his hair cut, and second, his comment, *to my relief, my accent has toned down a bit and I am starting to adopt a bit more of the slang*. His ultimate response to his physical difference was illustrative of the double-bind in which he found himself, and which subsequently emerged as a key theme from his narrative: wanting to be different, but not wanting to be treated as different.

Although James claimed that *the whole trip* gave him *a basis for understanding the world*, two experiences in particular resulted in direct and, according to James, permanent change in his thinking. In this respect these two experiences could be described as epiphanies – significant life events that result in redefinition of hitherto unquestioned assumptions (Denzin, 1989). These two epiphanic experiences essentially undergirded a process of transformation in James. Transformation, characteristically triggered by major life events (Mezirow, 1991), requires, according to Scott (1997), the replacement of “an old way of seeing and doing” with “a new way of seeing and doing” (p. 41). James’s old ways had clearly been replaced with new ways as a result of these two experiences.

The first of these experiences was in Tokyo where his sudden confrontation with *the reality of exactly what we are doing to the planet, fired up [his] ecological consciousness*. It was for James, *a turning point* in his thinking. The second was his student tour of Zeyrek in Turkey during which he realised that buildings had to be about more than *space or poetry; they [had] to matter*. These life-changing events fuelled latent convictions to the point where James, upon re-entry, became *very forceful about things [he] believed in*. These changes manifested themselves in a number of ways, some positive and some negative.

In its negative manifestations, it was the cause of miscommunication, misunderstanding and polarised positioning with others. In other words, negative response to these changes in James was primarily borne out through relationships. In his family, for example, his parents exclaimed, on more than one occasion, *oh, you’ve changed, haven’t you*. This comment, exemplifying trait attribution theory whereby complex situations are simplified to one of personality traits, clearly moves responsibility for others’ discomfort to the returnee (Brislin, 1981; Freedman, 1980). Similarly, his father asked, “*Where the hell have all of these [convictions] come from?*” in relation to discussions over air conditioners and fuel emissions. James’s ‘difference’ was, then, experienced negatively by some members of his family. James, too, experienced his difference negatively, often feeling marginalised within his family, as well as other relational contexts, as a result. Marginalisation emerges as a key theme in his narrative.

James’s university peers, equally unsure how to respond to the changed James, eschewed meaningful discussion over group projects. This *frustrated* James who was *craving just to have a conversation*. Lecturers, too, made assumptions about his changed capacity, despite his genuine requests for assistance: *you’ll manage. I know you can do it*. A changed perspective on the world, then, in some instances, made his re-entry more challenging. What

for James was experienced as a positive, affirming change in direction in his life manifested itself negatively, in some instances, at home. Yet, by the sixth month home, there was a clear shift in James's sense making of that. He was less confused and destabilised by his family's response, in particular, to his difference: *I'm not so worried about my relatives' inability to relate to me or understand how and why I'm different as a result of my travel. It is not my problem; it is theirs. I don't seem so precious about all of that.* Like Rebecca, James had clearly moved his thinking from self to other. Rather than seeing the resolution of the incompatibility of the 'new James' with the 'old James' as his responsibility, he began to see the resolution of that dilemma as others' responsibility.

In its positive manifestations, the change James so passionately embraced was most apparent in his individual architecture project work. He claimed that his newly found convictions *affected [him] much more than [he] realised*, with him consistently *looking more and more at opportunities to do something in [his] professional life that aids [marginalised people]*. His Venice Vianelli project was one example of this. Despite the challenges James experienced as a result of his changed self, he remained true to his convictions, claiming that he now *express[ed]* rather than *suppress[ed]* his beliefs. He considered this *the most important thing that happened* to him during his re-entry. This is consonant with the findings of Walling et al.'s (2006) study where returnee missionaries were even more convinced of the efficacy of their professional work. James now had a definitive purpose in his professional life; his change had a pragmatic, as well as an ideological, outcome.

That change is a cause of re-entry challenges is well documented in the literature (see, for example, Smith, 2002b; Sussman, 1986). It has been claimed, for example, that changes in value systems "seem to be the most powerful predictor associated with re-entry culture shock" (Uehara, 1986, pp. 433-434). Certainly in James's case, a change in values systems was the source of genuine angst within his family. Professionally, on the other hand, changes in values provided positive direction for his life. In James's situation, the critical variable that bound change with challenge upon re-entry was expectations, not values.

Returnees, characteristically, do not expect people or circumstances at home to have changed. People at home, characteristically, do not expect returnees to have changed. Re-entry literature has consistently provided empirical evidence to support these two notions (see, for example, Bossard & Peterson, 2005; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Martin, 1984). It seems that neither James, nor others – his family, friends and colleagues – was expecting change. This was fertile ground for relationship woes. As James lamented, *because I have changed so much, they don't see the same James that left, coming home, and that must confuse them a*

great deal. A similar space of confusion existed for James himself: *one of the biggest things I've had to struggle with...is the expectations of other people...it's an unspoken obstacle that you have to face when you come back – fitting back in with your family. I wasn't prepared for that. You don't expect to feel the way you do when you come back.* Of particular significance was his comment, *I don't know what I was thinking would be different about me by the time I got back.* Herein lay one of the immutable difficulties associated with expectations: while sojourners (and others at home) might be made aware of the fact that people are likely to have changed (thus reducing some of the stress associated with ignorance, along the lines of Janis's [1958] surgical patient research), they are unlikely to be able to anticipate the **nature** of those changes: *I have changed, but they don't know exactly what that means.* As Cooley's (1902/1964) "looking glass" notion suggests, it is not until we see ourselves reflected through others' response to us, that we truly come to understand ourselves. Only when the 'new James' was repositioned against the old backdrop did those changes, and the implications of those changes, become clearly apparent – to James himself and to others. Only then could people begin to make sense of some of those changes. Like re-entry itself, then, managing change must be seen as a process.

It was not only physical and attitudinal change brought about by the exchange that had a direct impact on the nature of James's re-entry experience; it was also the contrasting circumstances of James's Scottish life. Like Lynette and Rebecca, for example, there was a qualitative difference in the nature of James's experiences overseas and those at home. The rapid and perceived permanence of this change in the nature of experience, once home, had a direct impact on James, at times reinforcing his *appreciation* of his home culture, at other times, *frustrating* him.

It was the contrast between the home and the host culture that prompted for James a newly found appreciation of the physical environment. In a consistent pattern throughout the first six months home, James commented on his *appreciation of this place*, seeing, for example, the hills and the river *in a completely different way* to the way he did before he left: *I see them whereas before I didn't.* As an illustration of James's capacity for reflective thought, he commented that the things themselves hadn't changed, just the way he saw them had changed. He was well aware that it was his starkly contrasting experience in a dense, urban situation – *not like anything at home* – that contributed to his appreciation. Yet, not all of James's experiences of contrast in his home culture led to greater appreciation. Lifestyle was one of those.

The lifestyle James enjoyed overseas was clearly juxtaposed with the lifestyle James re-entered when home. Overseas, he had grown to appreciate the freedom that came with *just be[ing] who you wanted to be*. At home, there was an expectation that he would be the person his family and friends remembered him to be: *your hair is not short enough*. Overseas, he lived alone with a professor who *entertained a lot of people*, many of them ‘titled’ professionals and politicians. At home, he lived a *prosaic* life with his family. Overseas, James was *independent*, travelling alone, fuelling his architectural passion with his many European trips, his parents having *no idea of the situations [he’d] been in overseas*. At home, in familiar territory in his small home state, there were limited, if any, opportunities for exploring new buildings. He felt *very stifled*, his parents still wanting *to parent* him – something James found *difficult to comprehend*. James’s fast-paced, exciting, varied overseas life had been replaced with ‘same old, same old’ at home. He was having difficulty reconciling his *massive personal change* with the *tendency for things to continue [at home] for everyone else*. The transition from overseas to home was the equivalent of moving from top speed to stationary, from new to old. That this would be the cause of some cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957/1962) is understandable.

Cognitive dissonance is purported to be a universal aspect of any transitional experience (J. Bennett, 1977). As a transition experience, re-entry is, therefore, likely to precipitate cognitive dissonance (see, for example, Arthur, 2003; Walling et al., 2006). This was certainly the case in James’s situation. In the face of such dissonance it is common for returnees to strive for internal equilibrium (see, for example, Freedman, 1980; Kim, 2001). James sought equilibrium as he attempted to make sense of, and manage, his competing cognitions. He was clearly not comfortable with the *loss of common ground* his exchange had engendered at home or with others’ inability to *recognise the change [he] felt so strongly*. His lack of comfort and desire for equilibrium was evidenced in a number of ways: his attempts to understand others’ perspectives; his raised *self-awareness* – choosing carefully and analysing most interactions with peers; his engagement in self talk; and his *paranoia* surrounding his need to understand what people were thinking about him. At one point he decided that he had *made it so much harder for [him]self because of going away*. What was particularly awkward for James was that his competing cognitions related very much to *self*.

For James, the self became a site of conflict during re-entry. His choices in resolving this conflict were: remaining true to his ‘new’ self and potentially ostracising others and marginalising himself, or returning to his ‘old’ self, denying the changes he had undergone, compromising his integrity, but minimising the re-entry dilemmas for others, and by association, himself. For James, however, there was no choice; his commitment to his ‘new’

self was immutable. Yet, this was not an uncomplicated choice, or process, for, as Triandis (1989) reminds us, in his consideration of Baumeister's work, we have multiple selves: private, public and collective, each reflective of cognitions as they relate to self traits or behaviours, generalised others' perceptions of self, and significant others' perceptions of self, respectively. In James's situation, it was the incompatibility between his private self and his collective self that caused him the greatest consternation. While his private self ultimately dominated his re-formed identity, it wasn't without insight into the emotional significance attached to membership of social groups – the cornerstone of Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978): *my family is extremely important to me...but I just feel like I am on a completely different level now*. So, for James, the first six months home represented a process of seeking equilibrium, of coming to terms with his multiple selves, and feeling secure in his final commitment.

Cognitive dissonance theory suggests that the most common way for people to achieve equilibrium is to alter their beliefs about competing cognitions rather than alter their behaviour. Alternatively, people avoid situations that cause cognitive dissonance (see, for example, Augoustinos & Walker, 1995). In some situations, James avoided situations. For example, he *close[d] off from* interactions with his peers – despite the fact that he craved a *conversation* – rather than compromising his integrity by behaving the way they wanted him to in group work. In the main, though, James's strategy was to refuse to alter his beliefs; he refused to convince himself that behaving the way that others expected him to behave, was the best way of managing competing cognitions. Rather, he held steadfastly to his *very strong convictions*, accepting the *trade-off* that went with *express[ing]* rather than *suppress[ing]* his views. He maintained his convictions and accepted the difficulties that went with the consequences of that. He would rather make the *sacrifices* that went with leaving your home culture than stay and feel unfulfilled. The approach that James adopted towards his cognitive dissonance was not what the literature presents as a typical response: when people engage in behaviour that is incongruent with their beliefs, most will choose to change their beliefs to accommodate their behaviour (Augoustinos & Walker, 1995; Weaver, 1998). That he was prepared to show such integrity, believing in the veracity of his behaviour, suggests that the outcomes of the exchange for James, illustrated through his re-entry experience, were not only epiphanic and transformative, but enduring.

Themes emerging from the narrative

Marginalisation

One of the outcomes of an overseas exchange is that returnees can become marginalised in their home culture. James's experience of marginality in his home culture mirrored that of Hickson (1994), who claimed, "I did not know that sometimes I would feel uncomfortable and lost in conversations, that encounters would be somehow awkward and stilted, that many exchanges would have the effect of instantly revealing the lack of common points of reference" (p. 255). James experienced marginalisation in two primary contexts during his re-entry: his family and university. Ironically, he experienced marginalisation both overseas and at home, both of which were a direct result of his 'difference'. Clearly, 'difference' has a transient quality.

James experienced marginality negatively. His black and white drawing, a metaphor for his perceived separation from others, encapsulated this sense of marginality succinctly: *a whole level of integration that has stopped because of [my] difference*. He claimed that *the continuity [he] previously had with [his] family and colleagues [was now] disjointed*. None of his family, for example, had travelled before, so there was no common point of reference for understanding the growth, self-discovery and transformation he had undergone: *it just feels like there is a huge crossing that has no bridge*. He felt it *really difficult to communicate* with his brother: *I actually feel now that I don't know him very well and he doesn't know me very well*. If social interaction is understood as a mutually skilled performance (Argyle, 1969), it is clear just why James was experiencing such difficulty reconnecting with his family and why he felt as though he was *orbiting [his] own system*.

In a similar vein, James's interactions with university colleagues, no longer a mutually skilled performance, made him *feel external to the group very quickly*. He was *constantly thinking to [him]self that people [were] threatened by [him] and/or [his] experience and/or [his] manner and they [knew] it sort of [didn't] fit*. As a result he felt the need to fit himself *into a segment*. In some ways, James was representative of an "encapsulated marginal" – someone "buffeted by conflicting loyalties and unable to construct a unified identity" (J. Bennett, 1993, p. 113). Yet, James's conflicting loyalties were not between his home and his host culture, as is characteristically the case for returnees (see, for example, Christofi and Thompson, 2007), but between his own sense of self and others' perception of who he should be. He wasn't trapped by his difference, as is usually the case with encapsulated marginals, rather, he was confused by the outcomes of his difference – by others' difficulty in accepting his difference. He was genuinely seeking a solution to the marginality: *it is proving to be a very difficult task – but worth it all the same*. By the sixth month home, some of those feelings of marginality

had dissipated, a combined outcome of his change in cognitive construct – *it is not my problem; it's theirs*– and others' changed behaviour towards him – *I belong to the group much more than I did before, and it's as though they feel that, too*. This underscores the notion of re-entry as both an individual and social phenomenon, a discernible outcome from Rebecca's narrative.

Paradox

James's re-entry experience was littered with paradox: he found being home difficult (*I just want to **scream**. I just want to go again*), yet appreciated home more (*there is a certain sense of connection to this place that I don't think I can maintain anywhere else*); he acknowledged that he was a different person and fiercely embraced that difference (*this is not just something I am dabbling in; I just don't see the value anymore in doing something because everyone else is doing it*), but craved acceptance, not wanting to be singled out as different (*people are always looking for a point of difference... I don't want that...it pushed me out of the circle again*); he loved his family and wanted to be with them (*my family is extremely important to me, so access to them is important*), but felt *claustrophobic* when with them (*that's what's feeding the desire to be somewhere else*); he had found, by the sixth month home, a *level of comfort* – found *[his] place again* – but at the same time, he felt *utterly lost*; and he *crav[ed] going away again*, but felt *so guilty* about it. This paradox, illustrative of the tension James felt between life at home and life overseas, is aptly captured by his term, '*inbetweeness*'.

It is not uncommon for returnees to experience some level of psychological distress upon re-entry – anxiety, disorientation, restlessness, frustration (see, for example, Scheiber, 2000; Werkman, 1980). Clearly, James experienced such emotions throughout his first six months of re-entry. What characterises James's experience as somewhat unique, however, is that his feeling of '*inbetweeness*' was felt most keenly by the sixth month home. Re-entry literature suggests that by six months home, most returnees have adjusted to their home culture; '*inbetweeness*' typically dissipates with time (see, for example, Adler, 1981). While James certainly felt a greater degree of comfort and greater acceptance by others after six months home, his *uneas[iness]* with being at home was reignited during the sixth month. This sense of unease was prompted by three virtually simultaneous events: first, moving from his grandmother's house back into the family home; second, receiving an email and visual images from peers at his Scottish university; and third, receiving the freight boxes he sent from Scotland six months previously.

These three events caused James to feel a number of things: *uneasy*; *really homesick for Glasgow*; and *'otherness'*. He *wasn't expecting* to feel these things, nor was his family expecting him to feel those things. It was a stark reminder of *who [he] was and what [he is] now*. The two reconnections with Scotland were directly juxtaposed with his experience of moving back to live at the end of semester. His moving back home to live, was a reminder that *everything is as it was, and... always will be*. His reconnection with Scotland reminded him *just how rich [his] experiences were*. The confluence of these events disturbed James's equilibrium, just at a point where he was finally beginning to feel a greater sense of comfort and acceptance in his home culture. He had genuinely attempted to re-integrate into his home culture during his re-entry, despite early protestations of *want[ing] to go again* after his first attempt to live at home with his family. Now, he believed that maybe *[he] should go again*, as he was *craving* that *life-changing* experience. A strong and meaningful reconnection with the host culture, then, juxtaposed with the *prosaic* nature of life at home with family, clearly disrupted James's re-entry adjustment, particularly as it was accompanied by paradox.

The existence of paradox suggests tension and a subconscious attempt to reconcile conflict. Paradox is also congruent with cognitive dissonance – something James experienced consistently throughout his first six months of re-entry. The self as a site of conflict, so clearly evident from his cognitive dissonance, was further illustrated during re-entry as he attempted to reconcile his desire to reintegrate in his home culture with his desire to repeat his rich overseas experience. James had, as Mezirow (1991) claims, experienced those disorienting dilemmas that lead to transformative learning in adults. By the sixth month home, James's dilemmas – a direct outcome of the existence of a number of paradoxes – resulted in his desire to leave again gaining strong voice.

Conclusion

James was transformed as a result of his rich, and in many ways, privileged exchange experience, an experience that stood in stark contrast to anything he had previously experienced at home. As a result, he experienced marginalisation at home as others attempted to reconcile the 'old James' with the 'new James'. A critical dilemma for James was that he wasn't expecting such a difficult re-entry. He had expected to re-integrate into his home culture and be accepted by others in the same way that he always experienced acceptance. Yet, James wasn't prepared to return to the 'old James' just to appease those who struggled with accepting the 'new James'. His way of reconciling the internal conflict that accompanied his re-entry dilemmas was, in most instances, to believe even more strongly in the efficacy of

his 'new self' – *I have realised now that it is ok to be like that* – and to seriously consider going overseas again.

James's re-entry experience underscores many of the findings from re-entry research: change is not expected; reconciling competing values is challenging for the sojourner and those at home; a new identity is formed; marginalisation is experienced. In contrast to the findings from literature, however, James had not adjusted to his home culture after six months home. Certainly some of the tension had eased, but he wasn't comfortably re-integrated. The basis of most of James's enduring re-entry difficulties was, as with Rebecca, in relationships – family, friends and colleagues. He felt different; he was different; he was treated differently. He didn't want to be treated differently; he just wanted to be accepted as different. His re-entry, then, wasn't a sole endeavour; it was relational.

James's inextricably linked overseas and re-entry experience was, as Kim (2001) suggests, "both problematic and growth-producing...a double-edged process...simultaneously troublesome and enriching" (p. 21). The transition from the 'old James' to the 'new James', was fraught, both for James and for others. The ultimate outcome, however, was enduring change – metamorphosis. He remained true to his new found convictions. In this sense, his re-entry process was more about re-forming than re-integrating.

Conclusion

We cannot bathe in the same river twice.

(Heraclitus).

Eight years after my own cultural re-entry, I now have a better understanding of not only *what* I experienced – affectively, behaviourally and cognitively – but *why* I had that experience, and, more importantly, what that *means*. Dewey (1934) suggests that we engage in inquiry “to restore harmony and relieve the breaks and tensions of equilibrium” (p. 15). Certainly, my inquiry into others’ re-entry experiences was motivated by my own experience and a genuine desire to understand the phenomenon of re-entry more fully. Consequently, I now have a more complete, yet complex, picture. What I discovered from my inquiry into others’ experiences, however, has not restored harmony or equilibrium. Rather, it has highlighted the tensions, paradoxes and inherently idiosyncratic nature of individual experience. I have not sought, or found, ‘answers’ or ‘solutions’ to the complex phenomenon of re-entry. Employing a narrative inquiry approach, I have explored and portrayed the phenomenon through the lens of six individuals – all university students returning from an overseas exchange. Inquiry *can* and *should* provoke, challenge and question. Inquiry should, according to Eisner (1997), “enrich and enliven the conversation” (p. 268). Through sharing aspects of my own and others’ re-entry experiences I hope to have enlivened the conversation about cultural re-entry – with myself, with my participants and with readers.

This chapter will present conclusions to, and discuss implications of, the study, comment upon limitations and provide suggestions for future research.

Conclusions of the study

The aim of this study was to explore the re-entry experiences and perceptions of a small number of individuals. It sought depth over breadth and particularisation over generalisation in an attempt to counter-balance the dominant approach in the empirical literature of prediction, of seeking causal relationships between variables. Thus, the conclusions to this study are not designed to be generalised to a wider population. They are designed to highlight the personalised, unique qualities of individual experience. While this may be positioned by some as a limitation to the study, I perceive it as a strength; this in-depth study highlights the complex, idiosyncratic nature of the re-entry phenomenon, something not accessible through

traditional reductionist approaches. Notwithstanding the above, this study both confirms existing findings about cultural re-entry and extends and offers new insights, each of which will now be considered in more detail.

In its broadest sense, this study has confirmed the findings from existing literature, that re-entry is characteristically a challenging time for sojourners. All participants in this study, although in varying ways, and to varying degrees, experienced their cultural re-entry as challenging. These challenges related primarily to renegotiating relationships and self-identities, and readjusting to both academic environments and home culture lifestyle. The pre-determinants for these challenging experiences were invariably *change* – particularly change in values, perspectives, and understandings of the sojourner, but also change in the home culture – and *expectations* – realistic and unrealistic, of both the sojourner and those at home. These challenges were balanced, however, although to a much lesser degree, by positive experiences. Most participants were able to identify – in some cases, for the first time – previously taken-for-granted, unique and positive aspects of their home culture: the physical environment being one such example. Despite the varying challenges inherent in their re-entry experiences, all participants attested to the unquestionable value of their overseas sojourns, something also consistently cited in the literature.

Furthermore, most participants in this study found that the difficulties and challenges associated with re-entry abated over time. While not all participants had fully adjusted to their home culture by six months – as existing literature suggests is often the case – all had clearly experienced some easing of tension over that time period. This confirms the long-standing assertion in the literature that re-entry is a *transition* process.

While the above discussion adds weight to our existing understanding, there are a number of provocative findings from this study that extend or add to our knowledge of the phenomenon of re-entry. First, despite some of the general trends identified above, this study underscores the personal, idiosyncratic nature of each re-entry experience. Each participant in this study experienced re-entry differently. This is partly explained by the range of variables that impact upon, and are peculiar to, re-entry. Within the small sample in this study, for example, the number of previous re-entries ranged from none to three, the time overseas ranged from five months to 18, the exchange locations spanned three different continents, and the level of social support afforded each participant upon their re-entry varied. While some of these variables were quantifiable, it was the *qualitative* nature of each person's re-entry experience that emerged as particularly unique. This uniqueness was a combined result of individual and situational characteristics. Thus, for example, although all participants experienced some

easing of tension over the first six months home, one found re-entry relatively easy from the first day home and one experienced a gradual easing of tension over the first five months, only to be re-immersed in dissonance during the sixth month. Through employing a narrative inquiry approach in this study, the inherently personal and unique nature of each person's re-entry experience has been captured. This uniqueness of experience is a salient finding as it provides a perspective on the phenomenon of re-entry hitherto masked by traditional reductionist approaches to research. Narrative inquiry, then, unmask the re-entry experience.

A second finding from this study is the degree to which the overseas experience is symbiotically related to the re-entry experience. The significance of this finding pertains to its reinforcement of the notion of re-entry being part of a *process* rather than a *state*. *All* participants' re-entry experiences were shaped, distinctively, by their overseas experience. Their sojourns essentially provided the canvas for their re-entry experiences. This symbiosis is reflected in this study – ostensibly one about the phenomenon of re-entry – through the inclusion of narrative excerpts from the overseas sojourn, and subsequent references to them during the process of analysis. Thus, the study evidences consistent links between the overseas and the re-entry experience. Those participants who experienced the stimulation of large European city life on their exchange, for example, experienced inevitable juxtaposition when they returned to their small regional home state in Australia. Similarly, those who savoured the freedom of independent living overseas, struggled with the contrasting experience of living at home with parents. Juxtaposition, incited by the overseas sojourn, provided the backdrop for all of the participants' re-entry experiences. The re-entry experience, then, has been shown to be intimately tied to the overseas experience.

That *internal* processes rather than *external* processes dominated the re-entry experiences of the participants is the third finding from this study. Both internal (affective and cognitive) and external (behavioural) processes are well represented in the re-entry literature, yet the relative importance of these respective processes has yet to be fully explored. *All* participants in this study experienced little impact or effect from the need to adjust behavioural processes. Rather, affective and cognitive responses dominated their experience. Thus, participants, in their sharing, focussed on, for example: feelings of frustration, hurt, restlessness, confusion, anxiety, pride and confidence; changes in values, identity and capacity to see things from others' perspectives, and the impact of their own and others' expectations. This imbalance between external and internal processes is perhaps partially explainable by the fact that most participants were returning from cultures where behaviour codes were not widely disparate from their home culture. Affective and cognitive responses, then, predominantly characterised, and consequently shaped and informed, the re-entry experiences of the

participants in this study. This is a noteworthy finding, particularly for sojourners' relatives, friends and colleagues, as many of the challenges experienced by sojourners are indeed 'invisible' as *internal* processes. Thus, there may well be 'silent' impacts on the development and maintenance of relationships with sojourners.

The final finding relates to the significance of relationships during re-entry. While relationships have received some attention in the existing re-entry literature, their potential impact on both the duration and quality of a sojourner's re-entry has remained under-investigated and understated, the focus, rather, being on the individual – their personality traits, coping strategies and so on – a situation consonant with the dominant psychological approach to cultural adjustment outlined in Chapter Two. It is clear from this study that sojourners' relationships – familial, spousal, friendship and collegial – have a direct and profound effect on their re-entry experience. While individual cognitions unquestionably impact on sojourner's re-entry adjustment, others' perceptions of, and behaviour towards, the sojourner add a layer of complexity to the way in which the sojourner experiences the phenomenon. In this study, romantic relationships and parental relationships were found to have the most direct and pronounced impact. Sibling, friendship and collegial relationships also played a significant role, but to a lesser degree. Thus, it can be claimed that cultural re-entry is simultaneously an individual and a social phenomenon. The direct relevance of this finding pertains to the need to include others, over and above the sojourner, in the briefing and debriefing stages of cross-cultural transitions.

This study also makes a unique contribution to our understanding of re-entry through its methodological approach. While narrative inquiry is no longer, in itself, considered an innovative methodological approach, what *is* innovative in this study is its application to cross-cultural and intercultural research. In this respect, this study breaks new ground in this field. A phenomenon primarily historically understood through a reductionist methodological approach designed to enhance certainty, has now been explored in an alternative way – one designed to enhance multiple meanings (Barone, 2001).

Implications of the study

While students were the lens through which the phenomenon of re-entry was explored in this study, these findings may be of interest to the myriad groups who undertake sojourns, their families, friends and colleagues, and those responsible for organizing and managing sojourner travel. Raising awareness of the nature and impact of cultural re-entry, through preparation of both the sojourner and others, is an important step in reducing the cost –

personal, social and financial – of difficult re-entry transitions. As cross-cultural sojourns increase world-wide, such awareness-raising becomes an imperative.

Raising awareness of the phenomenon of re-entry is likely to ameliorate the negative aspects of re-entry and result in a greater 'return of investment', both literal and metaphoric, *because people know what to expect*. Understanding, and being prepared for outcomes, as initially purported by Janis (1958) half a century ago, is likely to reduce the stress associated with the re-entry process, for both sojourners and others. This augurs well for improved health, relationships and productivity –across all sojourning groups. As discussed in Chapters One and Two, re-entry is a transition process. As such, growth characteristically follows challenge. It should not, therefore, be the intention of awareness-raising to attempt to eliminate challenges, simply ameliorate them.

Awareness-raising should, therefore: be comprehensive – covering the affective, behavioural and cognitive dimensions of re-entry; involve not only the sojourner, but all other groups associated with the sojourner during re-entry; and be consistently incorporated in both the briefing and debriefing stages of cultural transitions.

Arguably, the most profound implication of this study is that no two re-entry experiences will be alike. Re-entry, as evidenced in this study, is a paradoxical phenomenon: it is experienced similarly, yet differently by each person. For sojourners to be made aware of this, is to both affirm and validate their experience.

Suggestions for future research

Opportunities for broadening and enhancing this study are numerous. First, the longitudinal aspect of the study could be extended beyond six months. In this study, participants' adjustment patterns were limited to just the first six months home. All demonstrated varying degrees of adjustment during this six month period. Extending the time period would allow greater opportunity for the identification of patterns in the transition process and, consequently, insight into the extent to which time influences adjustment. Clearly, the narratives I co-constructed were incomplete. They were not finite entities. As Nespore and Barber (1995) remind us, "such narratives describe situations as portions of complex journeys that continue to unfold" (p. 60). Mapping the continuously unfolding journey of the participants, therefore, would reveal new and different insights into the re-entry transition process.

A second possibility for future research relates specifically to the overseas sojourn. In this study five of the six participants sojourned for six months, and one for 18 months. Interviewing participants who have sojourned for longer periods of time would add weight to the empirical evidence informing the relationship between time overseas and re-entry adjustment, a relationship that has hitherto remained inconsistently correlated in the research literature.

Third, a broader range of cultural locations for the overseas sojourn (for example, developing countries) might provide valuable data on the extent to which the similarities and differences between the host culture and the home culture (cultural distance) influence re-entry experiences. In this study, all but one participant returned from affluent, individualist Western cultures where English was widely spoken. Such a broadening in scope of sojourn locations might also reveal interesting data related to the dominance of either internal or external adjustment processes. In other words, it would be interesting to investigate the extent to which sojourning in a culture that is culturally distant might reveal a greater importance of the behavioural aspects of readjustment.

Concluding comment

Cultural re-entry is the final stage in a process of what is often described as profound transformation for sojourners. Sojourners do not return home the same people who left. Home is no longer the same place the sojourners left behind. Thus, sojourners can never, as Heraclitus portends in the opening to this chapter, *bathe in the same river twice*. Nothing can ever, or will ever, be quite the same again. The world is forever experienced through a different coloured lens.

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